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ABSTRACT

This booklet presents a collection of seven practitioner research reports conducted by individuals employed through adult basic education (ABE), Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED), and English as a second language (ESL) programs and funded by the Iowa State Staff Development Committee. The practitioner research presented in the collection gives the teacher, tutor, and/or administrator insights into the area of their interest and concern, through interviews, questionnaires, journaling, and observation. The following research reports are included: (1) "Family Literacy Survey" (Gloria Stigler); (2) "What Strategies Can Best Respond to the ESL Students' Needs for Language, Support, and Community?" (Else Schardt); (3) "Reading Maturity" (Betty Dunn); (4) "How Do Our Graduates See Our Program?" (Lois Banse and others); (5) "Attributions Associated with Attendance: Insights into Attaining and Retaining Students in ESL/ABE" (Cindy Wilberding); (6) "NIACC [Northern Iowa Area Community College] Volunteer Conversation Partner Program" (Colleen Hovinga); and (7) "Attitudes toward Educational Opportunities for Iowa Prison Inmates" (Dianna Ball). Individual chapters contain references. (RS)

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ED 407 649

IOWA
STATE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER RESEARCH REPORTS
1995-1996

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INTRODUCTION

The State Staff Development Committee is proud to be able to offer to you this collection of practitioner research grants that were completed during the '95-'96 fiscal year. Practitioner research gives the teacher, tutor, and/or administrator insights into the area of their interest and concern, through interviews, questionnaires, journaling, and observation. It is the primary goal of practitioner research that the understanding of the questions qained through exploration will improve practice in the classroom.

This research was accomplished through the efforts of individuals employed through our ABE/GED/ESL programs who wished to pursue areas of interest pertaining to their work with their students. Little uniformity among the reports will be found as each report reflects the interests and style of the individual practitioner. Each researcher applied for a grant stating the question he or she wished to pursue, the methods that were to be used to explore the question, and a time frame. After a conference with the committee members, the applications were accepted and the research begun.

The Committee wishes to thank the Iowa ABE Coordinators for their support for sending representatives to the Committee and for encouraging their staff to make practitioner research a successful project. The Committee also wishes to thank the Virginia Adult Educators Research Network for their helpful suggestions in implementing practitioner research.

Copies of this report are available, as well as copies of individual reports, from
Miriam Temple, Bureau of Community Colleges, Department of Education,
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IOWA STAFF DEVELOPMENT
PRACTITIONER RESEARCH PROJECT

FAMILY LITERACY SURVEY

Gloria Stigler
Kathy Linda
Hawkeye Community College
Waterloo, IA
1996

Practitioner Research
Family Literacy Survey

Gloria Stigler
Katherine Linda

Procedure

This survey was developed and implemented by Gloria Stigler, ABE teacher and recruiter, and Kathy Linda, Literacy coordinator at Hawkeye Community College in Waterloo IA. The survey was given to 127 ABE/GED students who attend classes at the Hawkeye Metro Campus and at Independence, Cedar Falls, Evansdale, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Center sites. We administered the survey to the students during their regular classes times. We talked with the students about the purpose of the survey, explaining that we wanted to get insight into the interests and activities of our students. We also told them that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions and to choose the response that best described their family. We did not ask for demographic information on the survey, nor did we ask for that information on their children. The students wrote notes on the survey if they felt that their children were too young or too old to participate in an activity. (For example, for the question. "Do you read to your children?", one respondent felt that her child was too young to be read to. That was her determination, not ours).

Beginning Assumptions

Throughout the stages of this study, we talked about what we thought our results would be and how we felt that the study was progressing. In her duties as a recruiter for the GED program, Gloria visited the homes of students who had dropped out of class. While visiting students' homes, she noticed that many students who had children did not have books for children, so she began to collect books and gave them to students when she went to visit them. We felt that our survey would show that our students would not have children's books and other reading and educational materials in their homes. We also felt that from our conversations with students and information we had gleaned from our combined years of teaching that we would find that our students were probably not very involved with their children's schools and didn't know how to promote educational activities with their children.

We were also concerned how our students would interpret the purpose of the survey. We wondered if the students would try to give us the answers that they thought we wanted to get, that they would try to "please the teacher." We wondered if some of our results might indicate what students wish they would do with their children rather than what they actually do, a dilemma faced by all parents, not just GED students. Also, after reading a study in *Adult Learning* on "Adult Literacy Programs: What Students Say," we identified with the authors' concern that students are reluctant to share what they perceive to be negative information about the programs they are in. One student wrote, "We are not going to say that we don't like it because if we say that, they will take it (the program) away from us.(Nwakeze and Seiler, 1993, Sept/Oct., p.17). We were very concerned that type of sentiment would carry over into our study and that students would be very reluctant to share their honest feelings for fear of indicating that the teachers and the programs weren't meeting their needs. Finally, we were very worried that students might interpret the survey to be a means for us to determine another deficiency in their lives, another aspect of their lives that they weren't doing correctly. So, our major concerns centered on whether we would get accurate results from our survey and how the students were feeling about our motivation for doing such a study.

New Insight

We attended a Family Literacy Conference in 1995 in Topeka, Kansas, sponsored by the National Center for Family Literacy. As we learned more about the concept of family literacy, we were struck by philosophy which guides the practice of the program:

1. All families have strengths.
2. All families are doing their best to raise their children.

This soundness of this philosophy was reinforced by a study detailed in the *Kappan*. (Epstein, May, 1995, p. 704). "Researchers have also drawn the following conclusions. Just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education." The article also indicates that we need to "help all families establish home environments to support children as students....and provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

The Family Literacy conference leaders indicated that many programs looks at skills, abilities, and characteristics that students lack and work to fill in the deficits. This conference and our reading challenged us to look at the strengths and values that our students possess and build on those. We realized that even with our best intentions we were using our study to find student weaknesses rather than strengths. From that point, we became intentional about looking at our survey to determine the strengths that our students and their families possess.

Our Survey

In *Adult Learning* in the article Adult Education for Family Literacy (Nov/Dec 1995), Thomas Sticht refers to a study done by the Action Research Center of the San Diego Consortium for Workforce Education and Lifelong Learning. He writes, " The rating scale asks adults to rate how frequently they perform various parenting activities such as reading to their children, taking them to the library, helping with homework and so forth. A tabulation of responses from 131 adults in five different adult basic education and ESL programs indicated that adults vary greatly in how often they engage in these kinds of activities that can help transfer literacy to their children." Our survey, which follows, also shows the same wide range of results.

STUDENT RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ON THE SURVEY

(127 respondents)

1 = NEVER 2 = SELDOM 3 = SOMETIMES 4 = OFTEN 5 = ALWAYS

Do you attend parent teacher conferences?

1	2	3	4	5
17	4	15	10	42
13.3%	3.1%	11.8%	7.8%	33.0%
*19.3%	*4.5%	*17.0%	*11.4%	*47.7%

Children too young:	14	11.0%
Grown children:	3	2.4%
No children:	22	17.3%
No response:	0	

*Indicates the percentage of respondents when only those with school age children are factored.

Do you attend your child's school programs?
(Music concerts, plays, luncheons, fun nights, etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
15	5	23	20	24
11.8%	3.9%	18.1%	15.7%	18.9%
*17.2%	*5.7%	*26.4%	*23.0%	*27.6%

Children too young:	14	11.0%
Grown children:	3	2.3%
No children:	22	17.3%
No response:	1	0.8%

*Indicates the percentage of respondents when only those with school age children are factored.

Do you attend PTO/PTA meetings?

1	2	3	4	5
46	17	12	5	6
36.2%	13.3%	9.4%	3.9%	4.7%
*57.0%	*19.8%	*14.0%	5.8%	*7.0%

Children too young:	14	11.0%
Grown children:	3	2.4%
No children:	22	17.3%
No response:	2	1.6%

Do you volunteer at your child's school?

1	2	3	4	5
36	12	21	13	4
28.3%	9.4%	16.5%	10.3%	3.1%
*41.9%	*14.0%	*24.4%	*15.1%	*4.7%

Children too young:	14	11.0%
Grown children:	3	2.4%
No children:	22	17.3%
No response:	2	1.6%

*Indicates the percentage of respondents when only those with school age children are factored.

Do your children participate in extra school activites?
(Before and after school study and recreation programs).

1	2	3	4	5
31	6	22	12	15
24.4%	4.7%	17.3%	9.4%	11.8%
*36.0%	*7.0%	*25.6%	*14.0%	*17.4%

Children too young:	15	11.8%
Grown children:	3	2.4%
No children:	22	17.3%
No response:	1	0.8%

*Indicates the percentage of respondents when only those with school age children are factored.

Do your children participate in sports?

1	2	3	4	5
33	4	16	18	16
26.0%	3.1%	12.6%	14.2%	12.6%
*37.9%	*4.6%	*18.4%	*20.7	*18.4%

Children too young:	11	8.7%
Grown children:	2	1.6%
No children:	22	17.3%
No response:	5	3.9 %

*Indicates the percentage of respondents when only those with school age children are factored.

Do you read to your children?

1	2	3	4	5
8	2	23	24	40
6.2%	1.6%	18.1%	18.9%	31.5%
*8.2%	*2.1%	*26.7%	*24.7%	*41.2%

Children too young:	1	0.8%
Grown children:	3	2.4%
No children:	22	17.3%
No response:	4	3.1%

*Indicates the percentage of respondents when only those with school age children are factored.

Do you help your children with their homework?

1	2	3	4	5
16	6	11	24	29
12.6%	4.7%	8.7%	18.9%	22.8%
*18.6%	*7.0%	*12.8%	*27.9%	*33.7%

Children too young:	14	11.0%
Grown children:	3	2.4%
No children:	22	17.3%
No response:	2	1.6%

*Indicates the percentage of respondents when only those with school age children are factored.

Do you use the public library?

1	2	3	4	5
26	26	38	18	17
20.5%	20.5%	29.9%	14.1%	13.4%

No response:	2	1.6%

Do you have a library card?

YES	NO
79	46
62.2%	36.2%

No response:	2	1.6%

Do your children have library cards?

YES	NO
42	55
33.0%	43.3%

Children too young:	4	3.1%
Grown children:	2	1.6%
No children:	22	17.3%
No response:	2	1.6%

What activities do you and your children do together?
(duplicated count)

63	Play at the park, bow, play sports games, take walks, swim ride bikes
45	Watch TV/movies
38	Play board games, cards, play with toys
19	Read
18	Go camping, cookouts
17	Educational and cultural activities, like going to a museum
16	No response
14	Out to eat
14	Visit friends/family
11	Travel
10	Shop
9	Household chores
7	Talk
7	Go to church activities/family devotions
6	Cook
6	Eat together
4	Craft projects
3	Brownies, drill team, YWCA
2	Dancing
1	Everything

What advice do you give to your children about being successful in school?

22	Do your best
20	Study hard/try hard
14	You need a good education to get ahead/have a good life
12	Ask questions/get help if you need it
10	Do your work
7	Listen to your teachers
6	Go every day
6	Concentrate on what you are doing
4	Be good
3	Never give up
2	Don't make the same mistakes that I did
2	Learn something every day
2	Cooperate
2	Be all you can be
2	Get good grades
1	Wait to have kids
	Go to college
	Don't cheat
	Read a lot
	Don't get mad
	Don't let peer pressure get to you
	Don't believe people who say you can't reach your goals
	Don't compare yourself to others
	Improve on tests
	You get out what you put in
	Keep an open mind
	Develop good study habits
	Listen more, talk less
	You can do anything in this big old world

Since you have gone back to school, have you noticed a change in your children's attitude toward school?

YES	NO
40	30
31.5%	23.6%

(Yes category had 6 responses that children's attitudes have changed negatively).
(No category had 4 responses that children have always liked school).

Don't know	1	0.8%
No response	14	11.0%
No kids in school	15	11.8%
No kids	15	11.8%
Grown children	3	2.3%

Write a little bit about the storytellers in your family? Who are they and what have they passed on to you?
(Duplicated count)

Mom	15	Humor/adventures/stories about when we were little value of education/read to me/told me to try hard and apply myself/discipline/religion/the old days
Grandparents	11	Invented fancy stories and fairy tales/passed on the past/to be independent/the good old days/how to be a good mother
Dad	10	Funny stories/values/war stories/family history/ try hard
Whole family	9	Passed on the past/how hard parents had it/our heritage/ famous people in our family
Husband\Wife	6	Advice/passed on the past
Children	5	Make us laugh
Aunt	5	Tells jokes/ shares family past
In-laws	4	Stories about spouse
Uncle	2	Stories about the past
Boyfriend	1	Sharing about his past

No response: 40
No story tellers: 15

Do you enjoy and take part in musical activities? Please give examples.

YES	NO
47	61
37.0%	48.0%

Comments: When I was young
If my kids are involved, I enjoy them
I like music videos
I play piano, drums
I like to listen to the radio
I go to concerts at church
I sing in the church choir

No response: 19 15.0%

Which of the following materials are available in your home?
(duplicated count)

Magazines:	94 homes
Newspapers:	105 homes
Adult books:	65 homes
Children's books:	97 homes
Cookbooks:	84 homes
Comic books:	27 homes
TV/VCR:	112 homes
Bible/Religious books:	90 homes
Music tapes/records Cds:	107 homes
Photo albums:	107 homes
Board games:	80 homes

Radio:	121 homes
Musical instruments:	30 homes
Art supplies:	70 homes
Computer:	20 homes
Other:	typewriter dictionary encyclopedia
No response:	1

Conclusion and New Ideas:

Our survey moved us in to new areas. The survey indicates that our students who have school aged children are involved in school activities and concerned about how well their children do. They give advice to their children which shows concern and thoughtfulness. They also have families which celebrate their history and each other. On area of interest for us would be to determine more about the strengths of families and help them be aware of their strengths. We would also like to supply our students with practical advice in areas such as parenting and determining children's learning styles. We feel that our survey helped us discover that our families know what they should be doing, and we can be helpful in supplying practical ways of implementing these ideas.

IOWA STAFF DEVELOPMENT
PRACTITIONER RESEARCH PROJECT
NORTHEAST IOWA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
DUBUQUE DOWNTOWN CENTER

WHAT STRATEGIES CAN BEST RESPOND TO THE ESL STUDENTS' NEEDS FOR LANGUAGE, SUPPORT, AND COMMUNITY?

By Else Schardt, Spring, 1996

Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to Mary Strom for her encouragement during this project. I also wish to thank Miriam Temple, Margot Pettrow, and Linda McKinney for their helpful suggestions. My special thanks to my students who taught me much as we became a community.

This report summarizes a project which was carried out over a three-month period in spring of 1996. If more information is desired, I will be happy to share it with interesed persons.

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Iowa Staff Development
Practitioner Research Project
Northeast Iowa Community College
Dubuque Downtown Center, Spring, 1996
Else Schardt, Instructor in English As A Second Language

A. INTRODUCTION:

SETTING:

The setting for this project is a small classroom at Northeast Iowa Community College's Dubuque Downtown Center where I teach one intermediate level class of English as a Second Language. We usually sit around two large tables in a square. We have maps, a large chalkboard, a clock, a thermometer, bookshelves, a large English dictionary, and other equipment for our use in this classroom.

Our program is part of the Adult Basic Education offerings by Northeast Iowa Community College. Students in my class are immigrants, spouses of international students, foreign-born spouses of United States citizens, or short term visitors to Dubuque. Their time since arrival in the USA varies from two months to sixteen years and they represent a wide range of acquisition levels in English.

Our class meets two evenings per week--Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7 to 9 p.m. During the 16-session research period, eight women and three men participated in classes; however, during that time two men returned to their country while one woman was absent over a month due to family circumstances. Three women came originally from Korea, two men from Latvia, and one each came from Egypt, Malaysia, Pakistan, India, Tanzania, and Nicaragua.

Currently, students vary in ages from twenty-five to forty-five years.
All eight women are married and seven of them have at least one child each. One woman is married without children. The men from Latvia were both single and visited class for several weeks while guest player and coach for Dubuque's Fighting Saints ice hockey team. All the women were currently unemployed outside the home although two of them had recently been laid off from a local meat-packing plant.

MY PARTICULAR INTEREST IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT:

My particular interest in this project stems from my discussions with, and observations of many students who seemed to feel isolated within the community. Mothers, for example, did not seem to attend their children's school events nor the parent-teacher conferences. Moreover, students feared answering the telephone or making phone calls themselves. They also seemed unaware of ways to get information from the local phone book. In addition, students seemed frustrated over any attempts to read the local newspaper or other magazines. They seemed to feel inadequate about asking and answering questions. I sensed a predominant need for a support community in which students could develop their English language acquisition.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

What strategies can best respond to the ESL students' needs for language, support, and community?

(1) How can I best help newcomers feel accepted in my class?
(2) What kinds of discussion topics best help to affirm them as valued, mature persons when their English is somewhat limited?
(3) How can I help the members to become a support community for one another, both in the class and outside the classroom, even when their countries may not be traditionally on good terms with one another?
(4) What are some barriers which we of the USA inadvertently set up through the textbooks, questions, life-styles, and learning styles which we impose on foreign-born residents of the community?

RESEARCH LITERATURE:

I saw myself initially as a learner, listening, reading, and studying as much about each student's country of origin as possible. In particular, I sought articles and books which described cultural values, traditions, and philosphy of life. Multi-cultural Awareness materials from the REACH Center in Seattle, WA, as well as the World Book Encyclopaedia provided helpful information for some general cultural perspectives.

A second set of resources came from writers from other countries. Carol Verburg's thought-provoking collection of cross-cultural readings from around the world, Ourselves Among Others, allowed me to learn important viewpoints from voices other than our own USA voices. In a similar vein, I gleaned valuable insights through such translingual authors as Nigeria's Chinua Achebe (for example, in Things Fall Apart,) and India's Bharati Mukherjee (in Jasmine,) who is now a distinguished United States author and professor.

Several helpful articles in the journal, Adult Learning, published by the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, provided useful ideas and affirmed some of the strategies which I have been incorporating into my classes. For example, in "Adult-centered Classroom," Konicek described the following four basic elements for an adult-centered classroom: Meaningful Tasks, Interactive Learning, Choices, and Supportive Atmosphere. In another article, "Using Writing Journals with Adult Literacy Students: Some Options," Bardine showed how reader response journals, dialogue journals, and self-esteem journals led to improved literacy skills.

Finally, in the book Ministering Cross-Culturally, Lingenfelter and Mayers succinctly described twelve basic values in which western cultures differed from many other cultures. They showed, for example,how in a multicultural setting there was often a clash between task orientation and person orientation, or between time orientation and event orientation.

Since my philosophy of teaching English as a Second Language incorporates holistic, integrated, and interactive strategies, I searched the literature for appropriate activities which would promote lively conversations and increase understanding among members of the group. While most of the literature described here did not provide specific statistics, I felt it enriched my understanding of the potential and strengths of each student within a multi-cultural, multi-level classroom.

B. METHODS:

Data-gathering took place in informal ways both inside and outside the classroom. I had a definite syllabus planned for each class session; however, I often adapted the lesson plan to address a specific need which arose on that particular day. In other words, the people became the curriculum! See section E (Appendices) below for the questionnaires and other materials given for data-gathering.

The following methods of gathering data were used:

--Group discussions during which I took notes
--Discussions in pairs followed by oral reporting.
--Student-journaling for 20 minutes every couple of sessions
--Writing short descriptions or narrations following oral discussion on a topic.
--Sharing information by way of a diagram (e.g., drawing a family tree)
--Questions which students asked and/or wrote down for me to answer.
--One-on-one discussions with students during breaks, by phone, at community events, and before and after class.

Problems which came up included a lot of absenteeism, often connected with bad weather or with baby-sitting difficulties. Students also labored long over writing tasks but all of them expressed a desire to keep up with writing.

C. FINDINGS:

(1) Students were enthusiastic about describing their families and their home culture. They eagerly interviewed one another and discovered common hobbies as well as common likes and dislikes.
Students felt more comfortable discussing their own culture than the US culture. As the level of trust grew within the classroom, they asked many questions about various aspects of the US culture, for example, individualism, violence, divorce, and dating customs.

(2) At the end of the research period, students wrote they found the following topics the most interesting for discussion:
--family customs
--the weather
--jokes and cartoons from newspapers
--topics related to women
--differences in customs between their countries and the USA
Students said they found the following activities helpful for improving English and integrating better into the community:
--Newspaper orientation and worksheet based on the newspaper
--Reading the cultural reader and discussing the readings
--Finding information in the telephone book
--A lot of conversation practice--in large group, in pairs, and during breaks
--Grammar in context, in connection with idioms and readings
--Attending an event together

(3) The female students bonded well into groups and began calling one another between class times. They called me, too, and I called them. They arranged to help one another for rides for class events and non-class events. Some met together to share a meal and meet one another's families.

(4) At the end of the research period, the students wrote they still found the following situations difficult:
--Understanding others during phone conversations
--Television sitcoms and serials
--Gatherings with Americans who speak English in a variety of accents.
--Going to the bank

(5) Students requested the following additional topics for future class sessions:
(They communicated these to me via a short questionnaire at the end.)
--Improving speed and fluency of speaking and pronouncing English correctly
--continuing to build new vocabulary and practice it in class
--More practice with tenses
--Learning some medical terms
--Discussions using financial and economical terms
--Improving writing skills
--Activities outside the classroom
--Listening programs and activities

C. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Interpretation of findings below are grouped according to the four sub-headings of the Research Question (see page 1 above):

(1) What strategies helped newcomers feel accepted in the class?

The adult students in this class appeared to feel comfortable in the classroom and often expressed their appreciation for being allowed to discuss difficult topics even in their limited English. My affirmation of various values in their cultures seemed to help them feel at ease in the group. I felt that students enjoyed sharing information with one another and not just with their instructor. The strategies which I emphasized in each class session included questions and answers in pairs and in the whole group. We practiced many different kinds of questions and answers, always using full sentences, both written on the chalkboard and spoken in the group.

(2) What kinds of discussion topics helped to affirm students as valued, mature persons when their English was quite limited?

At first discussion topics appeared to flow best when they related to students' own cultures and families. Later, with much encouragement, they broached more difficult topics such as the relationship of their home country with the USA, touchy historical events, and problems of adjustment here in this country.
Students became quite creative in trying to explain their ideas, not only through talking, but also through role play, drawing, and miming certain situations. Moreover, bringing items which they had made or received from their countries stimulated much interest and discussion within the group. One very intentional objective of each class session was to practice speaking and writing many kinds of questions as well as answers. I noticed students use many of these questions and answers in their conversations. They also said that this activity helped give them confidence for speaking more English.

(3) What strategies helped the members become a support community for one another, even when their countries may have had some negative connections in the past?

For me the most exciting component of these weeks together was the development of friendships outside the classroom. Some called each other on the phone and invited one another for visits and dinner. I felt the safety and acceptance in the classroom atmosphere helped them to take this step outside. They also dared to strike up conversations with neighbors and said they felt more at ease about speaking on the phone. During their conversations in the classroom they found common threads of background traditions and common hobbies and concerns which drew them together as a support community.

We used a world map frequently and often discussed historical situations from the past, for example, in relation to past relationships of their country with the USA and so on. I was quite worried about the woman from India and the woman from Pakistan but they showed a lot of respect for each other and in their dialogues they said they found some common hobbies. Another concern I had was about the Korean people's attitude to the USA over the continuing North-South border issue. Again, they expressed wishes to help promote peace everywhere.

(4) What kinds of strategies, attitudes, and topics hindered the feeling of community within the classroom and in the wider community?

Barriers to English acquisition which I observed included a lot of unfamiliar idioms spoken by people outside the classroom, on television, and so forth. Students expressed frustration over acronyms which people used a lot in everyday language. I also noticed they spoke more freely when the classroom door was closed; furthermore, the women participated in discussions more fluently when no men were present. I observed some tension between the women and men and I wondered, but did not ask, whether the men objected to the women's active participation in a wide variety of topics. I could not help wondering whether same-sex class groups progressed faster than mixed-sex groups. I am not aware of such studies in adult classes for teaching English as a Second Language.

Changes Which I Plan to Implement:

I hope to implement the suggestions students gave me in section C.(5) above, focussing on new vocabulary relevant to everyday life, more intentional grammar practice, and frequent writing activities. I would also like to build on the support community concept by incorporating creative group activities, continuing to affirm the culture of each student, and occasionally inviting a guest speaker whose work arena we might be able to visit later.

Recommendations:

My suggestions for adult educators include the following:

(1) Explore ways to make your classroom as affirming and "safe" as possible. This may mean being aware of embarrassment which might spring up because the door is open, or because a man is seated too close to a woman, or because the instructor is using an inappropriate hand gesture or body movement. The first tools for good communication are questions and answers. Helping students to ask and to answer questions enables them to make connections and form community.

(2) Explore creative ways to use the people as the curriculum. Use positive values from their cultures, discover their needs and fears about learning English, and use them as resources for shared learning activities. Don't inundate ESL students with USA cultural topics. Have some topics on hand, for example, in connection with reading materials or around a traditional holiday time, but allow the students to ask about those aspects of culture which puzzle or interest them most. Use current news, local and international events, newspaper columns (even "Dear Ann Landers,") television shows, radio broadcasts, and movies to generate topics.

(3) Allow for quality time during breaks and during class times for students to interact with one another. I see this strategy as a powerful community builder. Another strategy involves allowing students to "show and tell" about items, pictures, and stories from their cultures. Hands-on strategies, for example, with the phone book and newspaper, and Total Physical Response activities help to keep tired students engaged, especially when classes are held in the evenings.

(4) Teach idioms in order to facilitate the learning of everyday English. Avoid abbreviations and acronyms until you have explained each one. Help keep your classroom a safe environment where students have proper space for seating and where they don't fear the listening ears of "outsiders." Try to be as impartial and non-judgmental as possible, regardless of your own deep-seated preferences for certain "kinds" of students or values. At the same time, always be aware of possible undercurrents of mistrust and discomfort within the classroom, affirming each student and encouraging mutual affirmation within the group.

Questions for Future Research:

How can instructors promote a better understanding between foreign-born and USA-born residents in a community?
What strategies lead to improved understanding and use of common English idioms?
What are the twenty most important writing tasks which students need in order to function effectively in a new English-speaking community?

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E. APPENDICES

(1) Outline for 16 Two-Hour Sessions For Teaching English As A Second Language, Intermediate Level

(2) Interview Questions used in Session #1 of the research period

(3) Worksheet: A Concert in Dubuque

(4) Newspaper Scavenger Hunt

(5) Questions For the End of the Research Period

OUTLINE FOR 16 TWO-HOUR SESSIONS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE, INTERMEDIATE LEVEL (1)

Session Number:	TOPICS & CONVERSATION	GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY	READING All About The USA	Writing Tasks
1.	Introductions: Interviews in pairs World map, USA map	Biographical Information Simple Present		Write about yourself. Interview Sheets
2.	Significant dates Speaking about dates and times Information sheet about facility	Plurals Capitals School vocabulary	Reader, #1 Hot Dogs Information sheet	Fill imp. events in calendars.
3.	Review information sheet and calendar. "My Family"	Questions about family Family vocabulary	#2 The Pony Express	Write about ONE person in your family.
4.	Expressing negatives in questions and sentences Pronunciation of soft and hard "th"	Answering in the negative	Family stories #3 Blue Jeans	Write about a business you'd like to start.
5.	Show something from your country; Cars, imports, exports, "dumping"	Simple past tense of common irreg. verbs	#4 Henry Ford	Write what you did one day last week.
6.	Giving dates and times correctly Popular sports in countries	Prepositions for times and dates	#5 Baseball	Write about your favorite sport.
7.	Interviewing: appropriate questions in various cultures	Positive and negative questions and answers	Read and share from journals	Write 10 questions for a friend or teacher.
8.	Strategies for reading a newspaper	Questions: Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?	"News For You"	Write about an interesting article.
9.	Family concerns Gold in our history Past tense of regular verbs	Past tense of regular verbs:-ed endings	#6 Gold Rush Articles about family	Use regular past tense verbs in a story.
10.	A Class trip to a concert			
11.	Discussion about concert Discussion about other music Bring a favorite cassette	Music vocabulary Past tense questions and answers	Read sentences from last session #7 Chewing Gum	Write about your favorite music.
12.	Listen to music The Mississippi and Dubuque's parks Environmental problems	Vocabulary about parks, rivers, comets	#8 Mark Twain #9 Bald Eagles	Write about the environment or a favorite park.
13.	The Phone Book is your Helper. Phone book worksheets	Information by phone Role play phone dialogues	#10 The Cowboy	Write a phone dialogue.
14.	Three important things others should know about my culture	Vocab. about cultural traditions	#11 The White House	3 important things about your culture.
15.	The Newspaper is your Helper Use local daily paper	Newspaper vocabulary contents, sections, etc.	#12. Alexander Graham Bell	Questionnaire
16.	A meal and discussion at the instructor's home.			

Else Schardt, Northeast Iowa Community College, Spring, 1996.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS Write the Date here:________________ (2)

1. What is your name?____
2. What is your address in Dubuque? ______________________________

   ____
3. What is your telephone number?___________________________
4. Where were you born?__________________________________
5. When did you arrive in the USA?__________________________
6. Are you married?_______________
7. If you are married, who is your spouse?______________________
8. Do you have any children?_____________
9. If so, what are the names and ages of your children?______________

   ____
10. Where do you work?______________________________________
11. What kind of work do you do?__________________________________
12. Where did you study English?_______________________________
13. What kind of music do you like? ____________________________
14. What do you like to do in your free time? What are your hobbies?

    ____
15. Tell me about your family.__________________________________

    ____
16. What is your favorite color?_________________________________
17. Why do you like this color? ______________________________

(3)

A CONCERT IN DUBUQUE NAME:________________________

Please answer the questions in COMPLETE SENTENCES:

1. Where did you go? I went to________________________________

2. When did you go?____

3. Why did you go there?____________________________________

4. What is the name of the theater? The name of the____________________

5. Who went with you?____

____

6. Where did you sit?____

7. Who sat in the seat near you?________________________________

8. What did you see? I saw...__________________________________

9. What did you hear?____

____

10. How many different groups performed?____________________________

11. Write the names of some of the instruments you heard:______________

____

____

12. What kind of music did you hear?______________________________

13. From which country or countries does the music come?________________

____

14. Which was your favorite group?_________________________________

15. Describe the theater.______________________________________

____

16. Describe the people in the audience. Were they young, old, happy, sad, bored, tired, or excited?

____

____

17. Did you enjoy the concert? ____________________________________

18. Why?____

19. Did you understand some things the people said in English?______________

Newspaper Scavenger Hunt: NAME:____________________ (4)

1. What is the high temperature in Des Moines today?____________________
   or Chicago

2. Where is a house for sale? What is the address?____________________
   What is the cost of the house?_______________

3. Which team won a sports game yesterday? ________________________

4. Name two companies who are looking for new employees:
   a) ____
   b)____

5. What is the phone number of someone who has a used car for sale?
   ____

6. a) What is the weather forecast for Dubuque?______________________
   ____
   b) On what page(s) did you find the forecast?______________________

7. Write down the main headline for the newspaper today.
   ____

8. Find the comic called "Dennis the Menace." Where is it? Section_____, page___

9. a) Where can I rent an apartment?_____________________________
   b) What is the cost of rent per month?________________________
   c) Where did you find the apartment? Section_____, page________

10. Who wrote a letter to the Editor in the paper? Where is it?
    ____

11. In which section and on what page is the Television program?_______________

12. Cut out the table of contents for the inside of the newspaper.

Questions For the End of the Research Period:
(Note: We discussed these questions and listed examples before students wrote down their responses.)

1. Which topics did you enjoy for our class discussions?

2. Which activities did you find helpful for improving your English?

3. Which topics were not helpful or not interesting for you?

4. What are some situations which you find difficult in English?

5. Please write some topics and activities which we should study and discuss and practice in the future:

Reading Maturity

Practitioner Research Project
Spring 1996

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I. Introduction

As an instructor in Hawkeye Community College's Independent Learning Center, one of my roles is to assess students before they begin studying at the Metro Campus. Many times a prospective student states, "I need to a tutor; I can't read," and then the students immediately scores a high school reading level on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

This dilemma--students fearing their reading ability is worse than it actually is--was one of the issues I attempted to explore in my research study. I also wanted to determine how students' perceptions of their reading skills affected their leisure reading activities. Based on my experience and a review of research literature in this area, I believe a low perception of reading skills may lead to less frequent reading activities. Less frequent reading, less actual **reading practice**, leads to lower reading abilities. Lower reading abilities translates into reduced reading comprehension, smaller vocabularies, slower reading speed, and less fluent writing skills. It is another "vicious cycle," and our students may be the victims.

The students at HCC's Metro Campus enter our program with their own goals, often to begin and/or complete study and testing for a GED. Many of these students need to brush up on basic skills before beginning actual GED study. Literacy tutors work individually with students who read below a fourth grade level. Students who read above a fourth grade level join a class of five to twenty other students who each work independently under the guidance of the ABE/GED teacher(s) assigned to the class. ABE/GED classes are designed to serve the needs of three different student ability levels. Room A serves students who read from a 4.0 to a 6.4 (grade and month equivalency) reading level. Room E serves students who read from a 6.5 to a 7.9 reading level. Room B and Room D serves students who read above an eighth grade level. Most of the higher level students are preparing for GED testing and general education goals. Students are assigned to a specific class, which meets two to five times a week from two-and-a-half to four hours per class session.

The ABE/GED students at Hawkeye Community College are very diverse in age, ethnic origin, and economic status. The students range in age from sixteen to 60 or 70 years old. There are students who approach English as a second language. There are

African-Americans studying in classes. We have students funded through Promise Jobs and other state and federal welfare programs; students who attend class under the surveillance of a parole officer; and students who lead middle-class lives.

I worked with a similar ABE/GED population in Lexington, Kentucky, for several years, and before that taught high school English. I have often been perplexed by the gap between students' reading ability and reading habits. My first literacy student in Kentucky knew only the alphabet when we started working together, but after a year or so she was thrilled to be able to read *The Cat in the Hat* to her niece and decode package labels in the grocery store. On the other hand, I taught English in an exclusive, private high school and had a ninth-grade boy there tell me he had never read a single book for an English class. His mind was sharp enough that he could reproduce on tests and papers what he had heard the instructor say about a piece of literature. He had fine reading skills, yet he was functioning as an immature, non-reader.

II. Literature search

The area of reading maturity has interested me for many years. I studied this topic while completing my teaching certificate at the University of Michigan in 1981, and have recently read several journal articles about reading frequency, taste, enjoyment, and self-perception as a reader.

Back in Michigan, I wrote a research paper on the topic "reading maturity," as it was then termed in reading journals. In one study of 899 seventh graders in 33 classrooms in the Midwest, the author found a discrepancy between reading achievement in academic terms (grade equivalency) and leisure reading habits and taste.[1] In another disheartening study, a researcher found a similar discrepancy between the literacy practices of ninth-graders and their parents. The parents were found to read and enjoy reading more than their teenage children. The researcher also uncovered major attitude differences toward reading. A majority of parents thought reading was restful; one-half of their children said they "never" read as a leisure time activity. A majority of parents thought people who didn't read were dull; few children thought so.[2] The author of the second study moans, "Have we possibly made skills which should be the means of reading instruction into the ends of reading instruction?"[3] Students who have proficient reading skills are not reading for enjoyment and further developing their literacy skills.

In the past few months, I have read several recent journal articles along the same lines: One study I read examined **reading frequency** and **self-perception as a reader**. The research subjects were similar to our ABE/GED students; they were "developmental college students" enrolled in study skills and reading improvement courses. The two researchers discovered that the actual and perceived reading ability of these developmental college students did not have an influence on the amount of time they spent reading school texts or leisure reading materials like newspapers or novels.[4] Although many of the students perceived they had weaknesses in reading (they listed speed, comprehension, and vocabulary as particular problems), they did not spend an adequate amount of time reading their college course texts, and they did little leisure reading. The authors of the study use the term "resistant readers" to describe these students. Another group of researchers insist that college reading is more demanding than previous reading experiences and that "many students do not always reach the maturation level necessary to deal successfully with the demands of college reading."[5] The authors of the previously mentioned study and other researchers propose that most adults read for practical reasons only, not for enjoyment.[6]

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[1] Maring, G. H. (1979). Maturity in reading for seventh graders. *Journal of Reading*, *22*, 325-331.
[2] O'Rourke, W. (1979). Are parents an influence on adolescent reading habits? *Journal of Reading*, *22*, 340-343.
[3] Ibid, p.343.

Yet **reading for enjoyment** is one of the hallmarks of educated, successful people. In another research article titled, "Shaking the tree of "forbidden fruit": a study of light reading," the authors found that over 80% of the doctoral students they surveyed did read "light fiction"--such as comic books, magazines, and romance, mystery, and adventure novels--growing up. As youth, 94% of those surveyed read this type of literature every day or several times a week. The same percentage or respondents (94%) still do read magazines, newspapers, and novels for pleasure, although 84% of them said most of their current reading is in professional or educational documents.[7] The researchers suggest that extensive, light reading develops more sophisticated reading skills. **Taste** in literature, whether high-brow or street-level, is not an issue in developing good reading skills, according to current research.

All of the research put forth the idea that teachers need to encourage students to **read texts they enjoy**. One study of middle school students, "The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS): a new tool for measuring how children feel about themselves as readers," encourages teachers to foster good reading habits and skills by providing students with texts that allow them to read at independent, successful comprehension levels. One way to accomplish this is by providing reading materials that are interesting and/or familiar to students. The classroom teacher must also give "constructive feedback . . . (and) strive to make the children more physically and mentally comfortable during the act of reading."[8]

This will create a classroom atmosphere that allows students to develop a high **self-perception of their own reading skills**. The authors, referencing studies by

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[4] Sheorey, R. and Mokhtari, K. (1994). The reading habits of developmental college students at different levels of reading proficiency. *Reading Improvement, 31*, 156-166

[5] Upcraft, M, Gardner, J., and Associates (1989). *The freshman college experience*. San Francisco: Josse-Bass.

[6] Sheorey and Mokhtari, p.164.

[7] Russikoff, D.A. and Pilgreen, J.L. (1994). Shaking the tree of "forbidden fruit": a study of light reading. *Reading Improvement, 31*, 122-124.

[8] Henk, M.A. and Melnick. S.A. (1995). The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS): a new tool for measuring how children feel about themselves as readers. *The Reading Teacher, 48*, 470-482.

Bandura and Schunk (1981) and Schunk (1984), believe that " . . . self-perceptions are likely to either motivate or inhibit learning . . . . (They) affect achievement by influencing an individual's choice of activities, task avoidance, effort expenditure, and goal persistence."[9] Students with positive attitudes toward reading do read more often and, as a result, become better readers and writers.

III. Methods

Aware of the effect of leisure reading on literacy skills, I attempted to discover HCC ABE/GED students' leisure reading frequency, taste, enjoyment, and perception of own reading skills. I administered a survey to 45 students, observed 30 students participating in a reading room experiment, and did literacy profiles of five students. The copy of the survey and the script for the literacy profile interview are in the Appendix of this report.

The teachers and students were very cooperative in participating in the survey. One class even did a test run of the survey before my final copy of it was distributed to the other six classes. (Note: one of eight normally scheduled classes disbanded for the summer.) I simply prepared the survey, made copies, and distributed the copies with a cover note in each teacher's mailbox.

I invited students to the reading room experiment using the same method: a note in each teacher's mailbox. I did go to two classrooms to remind teachers of their classes' experiment time after one class didn't show. I rescheduled the no-show class for the following day.

During the reading room experiment, I had willing (though unknowing) student participants. On five tables in a large, lovely, well-furnished room in the Success Center building, I laid out five categories of reading material. (I brought the books from my home in a large cardboard box.) There was one table with several newspapers--the *Des Moines Register*, the *Waterloo Courier*, a boating weekly, and an automobile sales publication. On a second table were reference books on topics including flower-planting, women's health, rocks and minterals, and a desk encyclopedia. On a third table was a small collection of nonfiction books: Mitch Albom's *The Fab Five, Discovering Louisiana* (a "coffee table" book), a classic book on raising your child's self-esteem, and a couple others. The fourth table held popular fiction books, such as *The Bridges of Madison County* and several adventure and detective novels. On the fifth table were classic fiction works: *Moby Dick, Treasure Island*, Hemingway's *Nick Adams Stories*, and a collection of short stories by a critically acclaimed, contemporary author, Grace Paley.

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[9] Ibid., p.471.

I regret I did not have a romance in the popular fiction category.

The total collection of reading material did appear to initially interest and hold the attention of the students who participated in the reading room experiment.

I ran into a time crunch in doing literacy profiles. I originally intended to interview five students from each of the six daytime classes! Obviously, I was not able to accomplish this, because of other time commitments.

IV. Findings

A. Frequency

1. Survey data

Question #2: *How many days a week do you read for fun? Do not include school assignments. Circle one:*

1	16%
2	18%
3	18%
4	11%
5	16%
6	2%
7	11%
0[10]	9%

If you lump these numbers together, 63% of students read for fun four or fewer days per week and 37% of the students read for fun five or more days per week. There are also 9% who never read for fun, included in the 37% who read five or fewer days per week.

Question #3: *How long do you usually read at one time? Check one.*

Less than 30 minutes	42%
Less than 1 hour	29%
1 to 2 hours	20%
2 to 3 hours	7%
4 hours or more	2%

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[10] A write-in comment on the survey.

This data reveals that 71% of our ABE/GED students do not typically sustain reading beyond a one hour period. I also recognize students have many, major time commitments--such as family, work, and our classes--which prohibit them from reading for extended periods of time.

Question #4: *About how many times did you visit a library or bookstore this past year? Check one.*

Two times a month or more[11]	2%
Once a month	13%
Every other month	11%
Three or four times this past year	9%
Once or twice this past year	33%
Never	31%

The number are much "thinner" at the upper end of this frequency scale than at the lower end of the scale. 73% of our student visit a library or bookstore four or fewer times a year. It was encouraging, however, to have a students write in that he or she visits the library or bookstore at least two times a month, but that students is in a minority of 15% of our students with frequent book-acquiring habits.

B. Taste

1. Reading room experiment

Ranked from most to least popular category, the following numbers reveal the percentage of total students participating in the experiment who stopped at a table and picked up a book to preview or read the text.

nonfiction	60%
reference	57%
popular fiction	37%
classic fiction	23%
newspapers	16%

---

[11] Another write-in comment on the survey.

2. Survey data

Question #5: *Check the items you enjoy reading. Check as many as apply.*

magazines	31
newspapers	27
information books or true stories	19
Bible, spiritual books	18
novels	18
other	4

These are actual numbers of responses checked by the 45 students who completed the survey.

In the "other" category, students wrote in adventure, comics, crafts, home and auto repair, country-western, history, and romance as types of literature they enjoyed reading.

Question #6: *Imagine you are stranded on a desert island with nothing else but food, water, and shelter for a week. What three books or types of books would you like to have with you?*

Magazines were the most commonly packed reading material for this desert island stay. Perhaps students imagine that being on a desert island is similar to a very long wait in a doctor's office! Seventeen respondants wrote "magazines" or a specific magazine title, for example, *Sports Illustrated, Car and Driver, People, YSB, National Geographic*, and *True Stories*.

Sixteen respondants wrote "novels" would be nice to have on a island. Eight titles, four genres (romance, mystery, westerns, adventure), and one author were listed specifically.

Twelve students wanted to have a Bible to read on the island.

Five resourceful students would pack a survival book.

Five other students on the imaginary island would like to read a newspaper.

In the miscellaneous category, four students wanted information books ("how to," health foods, and a word book were mentioned); and two students wanted books in each of the following categories: comics, nature, and crafting. Two serious students would take along their GED books. One student wanted to have a law book on the island, and another lone student would bring a map.

3. Comparison and summary of reading room and survey data

There appears to be a discrepancy between the percentage of students who visited the newspaper table in the reading room experiment and the number of students who checked that they enjoyed reading newspapers on the survey.

There is obviously a very wide range of leisure reading interests among the ABE/GED students at Hawkeye Community College.

C. Enjoyment

1. Survey data

Question #1: *Rate the following free time activities by how much you enjoy them. (5 = favorite, 4 = next favorite . . . 1 = least favorite)*

I analyzed the responses to this question in two ways.

a. Percentage of students who ranked each of the survey question items their favorite activity (a "5"):

Watching TV	27%
Being with friend(s) or family	47%
Reading books, magazines, or newspapers	4%
Shopping	22%
Playing sports or games	16%

b. Percentage of students who ranked reading in each of the five "likeability" categories, from 5 (favorite) to 1 (least favorite):

5	4%
4	38%
3	11%
2	11%
1	36%

A better grasp of statistics would have been useful to me in analyzing the data from this question. The question would also have been more effective as a Likert scale, with a rating of 1 to 5 possible for each item. Some students did actually respond to the question this way.

I also would eliminate the item "Being with friend(s) or family" from the list of activities if I were to do the survey over again. This item represents a more fundamental pasttime than the other leisure activities. I am not surprised that very high percentages of students ranked this their favorite activity. A more accurate appraisal of enjoyment of leisure time activities would have been possible if the item "Being with friend(s) and family" were eliminated.

D. Self-perception of own reading skills

1. Survey data

Question #7: *How would you rate your reading ability. Circle one.*

poor	2%
fair	42%
good	44%
excellent	11%

It is encouraging to see that a majority of our ABE/GED students believe their reading ability is "fair" or "good," and more students believe they are "excellent" readers than believe they are "poor" readers.

Question #8: *If you feel you have weaknesses in reading, what are they?*

The 39 responses to this question include the following:

speed	2
comprehension	7
vocabulary	9
pronouncing words	10
boredom	4
fatigue	1
restlessness	2
distractability	3
translation	1

"Vocabulary" and "pronouncing words" could be lumped together as word attack problems. The personal attributes of "boredom," "fatigue," "restlessness," and "distractability" also seem to affect a sizeable number of ABE/GED students.

Question #9: *What are your strengths in reading?*

Comments made by respondents include the following:

speed	3
comprehension	5
vocabulary	1
pronouncing words	2
spelling	2
fluency	1
concentration	1
enjoyment	6
analysis	2
frequency	1
research	1
perserverence	3

Comments represented by these numbers include:

"It has to be interesting."
"I can read when people are around."
"I remember a lot after reading if it's a very good book
"It it's worth reading, I can read it well."
"Good sleep." (ha, ha)
"Reading books to my children,"
"Trying to make it mean something to me."
"Understanding the author's point."
"Looking up things."
"I can read one book a day."

It is interesting that the same items mentioned as weakness for Question #7 are mentioned as strengths for Question #8. The number of strength responses was lower than the number of weakness comments, however.

V. Discussion

The responses to Question #2 indicate we have a wide range of leisure reading frequency in our ABE/GED population. These responses and the responses to Question #3 also indicate that our **students are reading on their own**, developing the reading skills necessary for success in our classes and future life.

Responses to Question #3, however, indicate that students do not sustain their reading activities. This could be do to family, work, and school responsibilities. The days of sitting in a lawn chair or laying on a bed and reading tend to disappear after adulthood. We should, however, be sensitive to the idea that students may not have access to literature that they think is worth reading for an hour or longer. Bringing literature of all kinds into our classrooms and discussing books read outside class in our classrooms would create a forum that would encourage more sustained reading outside of class.

As is clear in the responses to Question #4, our ABE/GED students are infrequent visitors at bookstores and libraries. We might track down a good used bookstore with them and encourage use of the public library. Making a library book part of a class assignment would encourage more frequent library use.

The reading room experiment and Question #5 and Question #6 revealed that our students enjoy reading a wide range of material. Teachers need to evaluate the variety of literature available in their classrooms. Bringing in newspapers, magazines, and reference books might light a spark in an infrequent reader's mind. Obviously our students bring a wealth of experience into our classrooms. We can extend their range of experience by encouraging supplemental, light reading.

The response to Question #1 was a disappointment. It appears that reading is not high on the list of favorite things to do in free time for most of our ABE/GED students. Perhaps if we beef up our efforts to match students with reading material they enjoy, we might get more students stating they enjoy reading as one of their favorite free time actities.

As for our students self-perceptions, as indicated by responses to Question #7 through Question #9, they have some degree of confidence in their reading ability, yet a significant number of respondants wrote they had trouble with vocabulary and pronouncing words. As teachers we need to let our students now that everyone mispronounces words (and if someone corrects you, just tell them you're using a regional dialect!). Vocabulary is developed in large part by reading, and we need to advice students not to put the cart before the horse. Techniques for word study, such as keeping a running list of new words in a reading journal, could be taught in our classes.

VI. Conclusion

In summary, this research is only a launching point. More work needs to be done in designing and encouraging leisure reading activities for our students. We must break the cycle of lowered perceptions of reading skills, less frequent reading practice, less competent reading skills, and even lower perceptions of reading skills. Our ABE/GED classrooms are a vehicle for changing this cycle of immature readers.

We need to encourage our students to develop the life-long reading habits necessary for survival, economic success, and enhanced quality of life.

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VIII. Appendix

Hawkeye Community College
Adult Basic Education
Reading Survey
May 1996

1. Rate the following free time activities by how much you enjoy them. (5 = favorite, 4 = next favorite . . . 1 = least favorite)

_____ Watching TV

_____ Being with friend(s) or family

_____ Reading books, magazines, or newspapers

_____ Shopping

_____ Playing sports or games

2. How many days a week do you read for fun? Do not include school assignments.

Circle one: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. How long do you usually read at one time? **Check one.**

_____ Less than 30 minutes

_____ Less than 1 hour

_____ 1 to 2 hours

_____ 2 to 3 hours

_____ 4 hours or more

4. About how many times did you visit a library or bookstore this past year? **Check one.**

_____ once a month
_____ every other month
_____ three or four times this past year
_____ once or twice this past year
_____ never

5. Check the items you enjoy reading. **You may check more than one item.**

_____ newspapers
_____ magazines
_____ novels
_____ information books or true stories
_____ the Bible or other spiritual book
_____ other (title or type)_______________

6. Imagine you are stranded on a desert island with nothing else but food, water, and shelter for a week. What three books or types of books would you like to have with you?

7. Circle what you believe is your reading ability.

poor fair good excellent

8. If you feel you have weaknesses in reading, what are they?

9. What are your strengths in reading?

*Name:*_________________________
*Classroom:*_____________________
*Teacher:*_______________________

Practitioner Research Grant
offered by

Iowa State Staff Development

"How Do Our Graduates See Our Program?"

A Survey of Graduates of the Kirkwood Adult High School Program

Designed and Implemented by:

Lois Banse, Instructor, Kirkwood Vinton Center
Marlys Hoon, Instructor, Kirkwood Tipton Center
Sandy Weller, Instructor, Kirkwood Washington Center

Introduction

As part of our efforts to assess the effectiveness of the Kirkwood Adult High School program, we found it necessary to take a look at our students' perceptions of the services we offer them.

Through our survey, we identified areas of student satisfaction, and areas of improvement. This survey was designed to measure not only our students' immediate impressions, but also the effect completing high school with us had on their lives after one or more years.

Because of our commitment to providing quality education to our students, we will continue to use measures like these to recognize our achievements and identify future activities.

Lois Banse
Marlys Hoon
Sandy Weller

HOW DO OUR GRADUATES VIEW OUR PROGRAM?
SURVEY RESULTS

A total of 180 color-coded surveys were sent to Kirkwood Adult High School graduates from the Tipton, Vinton and Washington Centers on April 20, 1996. Colors denoted the attendance center of the student. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was enclosed. There were 28 responses, and twenty-five were unable to be delivered.

In addition the instructors at Tipton, Vinton and Washington conducted 30 interviews - 10 from each center. Results were very similar.

The following statistics represent total results:

40 received GED diplomas.   18 earned high school diplomas.

Responses came from 1989 through 1996 graduates. Most were from the 1994 to 1996 classes.

Ages of the students ranged from 17 to 71 with the majority from 17 through 39.

Although most of the students said "yes" education had opened opportunities for them, some said they had completed high school for personal satisfaction, or if they responded with a "no" they had not yet been able to continue their education in order to get a better job.

Support systems that helped the students most were family and friends, closely followed by the instructors.

Flexible hours and being able to progress at their own rate were circled by most of the graduates as factors that best filled the needs of the students.

Although most felt the program was fine as is, the following suggestions were made for improvements:

1) *Although the choice was made by the student to take the GED, several felt that the program could be improved with more courses, and with career counseling.*

2) *Find an area of interest, and work in that area to build up self-esteem and to develop better study habits.*

3) Work with the students on time management skills by setting up a regular study schedule.

4) Try to motivate students by letting them sit in at the back of a college course to enable them to get a glimpse of what the whole picture is.

5) Set up a "Peer" mentor program where a student close to completing the high school completion program would encourage a new student in their transition to this type of learning atmosphere.

The list of jobs held since graduation was as varied as the students we serve. Although there were several who received promotions after graduation, many stayed in the same position.

Nearly half of the graduates attended college, at least for awhile. Some are planning to attend later when they have more money.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THIS SURVEY?

The Kirkwood Adult High School offers a very good alternative education for many students. As in the past the older, more mature students tended to be more motivated, and aware of the difference an education can make.

A problem that was alluded to by GED graduates was that they needed more instruction and career counseling; yet when the average student chooses to take the GED tests rather than finish high school completion courses - it's because they're in a hurry!! Several graduates feel they are stuck in the job market because they need more training.

The question is: How do we help them achieve their immediate goal, but also make them aware that they may need to set goals for the future?

The other suggestions for improving our program were excellent, and by sharing them with other teachers we can find ways to implement them.

The information from this survey will be shared with other Kirkwood Adult High School teachers at an inservice in August, and with other ABE teachers at the IALL conference in the fall.

TABULATION OF RESULTS

Dear Kirkwood Adult High School Graduate:

Please take a few minutes to complete this survey, then return it in the enclosed envelope. We value your opinions and want to know how you viewed our program. Please feel free to add any comments. You may sign this survey, if you wish.

(Not all graduates answered all the questions. Tally includes mailed-in surveys and surveys done by interview.)

1. Which diploma did you receive? GED **40** Adult High School Diploma **18**

2. What year did you graduate? 1989 **1** 1990 **2** 1991 **4**
1992 **5** 1993 **7** 1994 **8** 1995 **17** 1996 **9**

Age at graduation 17 - 19 **16** 20 - 29 **17** 30 -39 **14**
40 - 40 **7** 50 - 59 **2** 64 **1** 71 **1**

3. Has earning your diploma helped open opportunities for you? Yes **43** No **9**
Not yet **2**

4. What support system most helped you reach your goals? **Circle all that apply**.

Family **38** Friends **26** Spouse **12** JTPA **8** Promise Jobs **9**

Kirkwood instructors **25** Bridges to Literacy **2** Green Thumb **2**

GED Scholarship **3** Other - **Boredom, GED book at library, military opportunities, church, myself - 3.**

5. Which of the following factors best filled your needs? **Circle all that apply**.

Flexible hours **43** Individualized instruction **17** Progressing at your own rate **44**

6. Were the course guide instructions clear? Yes **41** No **0**
Or did you depend on the instructor's explanations? Yes **9** No **15**

7. How can the program be improved?

Program is good the way it is - 17

More night classes - 3

I was satisfied.

As long as you keep the type of instructors, who care, I don't see how you could improve.

It's a great program.

Separate Assure and GED programs.

More to study

Environment was spacious.

GED questions need to be worded better.

Advertise hours so people know when they can come in.

GED graduate wanted more job counseling.

Help students to find areas of interest to build self-confidence and to develop better study habits.

Work with students on time management skills by setting up a regular study schedule.

Try to motivate students by letting them sit in the back of a college course to enable them to get a glimpse of what the whole picture is.

Set up a "Peer" mentor program where a student close to completing the high school completion program would encourage a new student in their transition to this type of learning atmosphere.

8. Briefly describe the work experience you have had since graduation.

Student   Hardee's   Jiffy lube, short term shop work

Variety of jobs   IBSSS   CNA, Used car inventory manager

I got a good job and was able to get a loan for a house.

Not working, but I have more confidence. - 2

Started at Manpower, and from there to intermittent food inspector.

Carpentry/ factory   Cook   CNA at Lutheran Home

No work now - 2   Farming   Hardee's/ IBP

Construction, Restaurant, Auto Mechanic   Plastics

College   McDonald's   Super 8   Not much

Factory - Excel- meat processing (12 hour days!)

Factory   Day care   Job promotion from mechanic to fleet manager.

Continued nursing courses   Business and typing classes to start own business

Factory freelance troubleshooter/ secretary

CNA   I got a better paying job, so I can learn and train more.

Diesel mechanic, truck driver, parts expediter.

From Shift Coordinator to "Just-in-time" Coordinator.

Cook/ Wendy's   Professional painter   Unemployed

Went to school for Medical Terminology   MCI   Waitress

Factory   Help with parent's carpet cleaning business.

Became a "mommy"

9. What position do you now hold?

Starting college in May   Home mom   Supervisor/Hardee's
House parent/bus aide   Senior Center Service   Truckdriver
Clerk at Theisen's   Telemarketer Representative
Still working on computer skills   Carpenter   Cook   CNA
GS-5-Step 1 FSIS- Intermittent meat and poultry inspector
Thermco-laborer   Not working, in an accident
Restaurant maintenance   Manager, Brighton Cafe   Student - 2
Working toward management   Housekeeping   Customer service
Meat cutter   Schwann's   Fleet manger, trainer
Cashier   Factory Supervisor   CNA   Production
Truckdriver   Planner/analyst   CDS inserter
Professional painter   Cook at nursing home   Telephone sales
Assistant manager   Between jobs   Household executive
Stay at home   Truck driver for CDS   Laying asphalt

10. Did you continue your education by attending a college? Yes **21** No **32**
11. If yes, what college do/did you attend? Kirkwood **18** Other **3**
Plans to attend Kirkwood **5**

Please feel free to add any comments you may have on the back of this form.

Most of the comments on the back were thanks to the instructor from the graduate's center.

Dear Kirkwood Adult High School Graduate:

Please take a few minutes to complete this survey, then return it in the enclosed envelope. We value your opinions and want to know how you viewed our program. Please feel free to add any comments. You may sign this survey, if you wish.

1. Which diploma did you receive? GED Adult High School Diploma

2. What year did you graduate? 19____ Age at graduation _______

3. Has earning your diploma helped open opportunities for you? Yes No

4. What support system most helped you reach your goals? **Circle all that apply**.
   Family Friends Spouse JTPA Promise Jobs
   Kirkwood instructors Bridges to Literacy Green Thumb
   GED Scholarship Other ________________________________

5. Which of the following factors best filled your needs? **Circle all that apply**.
   Flexible hours Individualized instruction Progressing at your own rate
   Other (please explain) ________________________________

6. Were course guide instructions clear? Yes No
   Or did you depend on the instructor's explanations? Yes No

7. How can the program be improved? ________________________________
   ____

8. Briefly describe the work experience you have had since graduation.
   ____
   ____

9. What position do you now hold? ________________________________

10. Did you continue your education by attending a college? Yes No

11. If yes, what college do/did you attend? ________________________________

Signed_________________________ _______________, 1996

Please feel free to add any comments you may have on the back of this form.

Attributions Associated With Attendance:
Insights into Attaining and Retaining Students in ESL/ABE

Cindy Wilberding
Western Iowa Tech Community College

Running Head: ESL ATTENDANCE

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Galenza for his direction and never-ending patience in answering my innumerable questions. I would also like to thank Lorenzo Medrano for the tremendous effort he put into this project. Finally, thanks to all of the participants, especially the students in the ESL class, for making this study such an enlightening and rewarding experience.

Introduction

I have been involved in the English-as-a-Second Language adult class, first as a volunteer assistant and later as a teacher, in LeMars, Iowa since October, 1994. LeMars is a small, rural community located in northwest Iowa. The ESL class offers multi-level instruction one evening per week for two hours. The students' ages range from eighteen to fifty-eight years old. Although there appears to be a population with limited English speaking skills in the LeMars community that may benefit from the ESL program, the regular attendance rate falls below what may be acceptable to warrant its continuation. Therefore, I proposed to address the following question:

Why is there a low attendance rate in this class?

Methods

Design and Subjects

Twenty-seven out of an estimated population of fifty adults who speak English as a Second Language from LeMars, Iowa participated in the study, and each was paid the sum of $5.00.

The sample consisted of fourteen females and thirteen males, and their ages ranged from a category of sixteen to twenty-years-old through a category of forty-one to fifty-years-old. As is culturally represented in the LeMars ESL population, all but one of the participants were originally from Mexico.

An effort was made to contact all students listed on the enrollment records of the LeMars ESL class from October of 1994 through October of 1995. The remaining participants in the target population were selected primarily by accidental sampling. The participants were thus assigned to three strata identified as: "Never Attended," "No Longer Attend," and "Currently Attend." The Currently Attend group consisted of three participants out of a possible number of three subjects, the Never Attended group consisted of thirteen participants out of an estimated number of twenty-six subjects and the No Longer Attend group consisted of eleven participants out of a possible number of twenty-four subjects. An additional six of the twenty-four possible No Longer attend subjects were omitted on the basis that they had moved or had taken a job that interfered with attendance.

The former two teachers of the LeMars ESL class, and a current teacher's assistant also participated in this study by responding to a mail survey questionnaire.

Procedure and Materials

Initially, an informal interview was conducted with the two former teachers and the current assistant teacher of the LeMars ESL class to gain an input into the development of the questionnaires.

A follow-up mail survey was then sent to and returned by all three teachers asking their opinions as to the possible causes and solutions to the low attendance rate (see Appendix D).

Next, three paper-and-pencil survey questionnaires were developed specifically for each of the ESL groups for the survey. In reviewing literature on this topic, I chose to explore such reasons as given by students for leaving the adult education program in the Richmond study (e.g., Barton & Fleischman, 1993) and as categorized by Cockley (1993b) as "personal (psychological, situational) and external, (environmental, non-school related)" (p.18). These types of factors are a valid area for my research to discover if there are external problems that are preventing the attendance of those who wish to come to the LeMars ESL class; and to determine which of these problems can possibly be nullified by modifying the current ESL program. As part of my research questionnaire, I, therefore, included questions pertaining to external factors such as hours and days of employment, weather, childcare and transportation.

Similar to the Big Stone Gap team (e.g., Robbins & Collier, 1993), I wanted to gain an insight into what students have found in lieu of what they had expected in the class concerning factors that Cockley (1993b) defined as "institutional, academic program" (p.18). To do this, I included an evaluation in my survey questionnaire for students to rate the following: the teacher's ability, the textbooks, the location of class, the time the class meets, the number of students, the number of meetings, the length of each class, the class work and the class activities.

As the results from the Fairfax study suggested, I also believe that class bonding can be a reinforcing factor in student retention (e.g., McQuire 1993; Blankman, 1993). In the LeMars ESL class, however, all of the students are well acquainted with each other both inside and outside of the classroom; so I did not incorporate the study of bonding in my research. I did, however, pursue the concept of motivation mentioned in this and the other two studies to determine if there is a sufficient number of people in this area who have a motivation to attend the LeMars ESL class. My assumption is that individuals from the target population in my study who are employed, possess good English skills, have someone to translate for them (perhaps their children), and do not intend to stay long in the U.S. may not have a high motivation to attend the ESL class. To explore this assumption, I included questions in my survey questionnaire that examined these possibilities. I also utilized a question from the Fairfax survey to ask former teachers of the LeMars ESL class what effect they felt the open entry/open exit policy had on retention. That is, the current policy that exists which allows students to enroll in the class or leave the class at any time (Appendices A, B & C).

I administered a questionnaire to a participant from the "Currently Attend" group as a pre-test. Because the use of a written survey would also pose a problem for my research project due to the language barrier, Lorenzo Medrano a bi-lingual student was paid the sum of $200.00 to present and translate the written questionnaires to target respondents from the Hispanic population. By distancing myself from the interviewees, I also hoped to eliminate interviewer bias and promote open and honest responses.

After rehearsing the procedure for administrating the questionnaire with me, the interviewer contacted potential participants from a list representing past and present students in the LeMars ESL class and adults from the general Hispanic population whose names were not on the list. In December, 1995, while the class was on Christmas break, the interviewer then met with those who wished to respond; and he aided in their completion of the questionnaire.

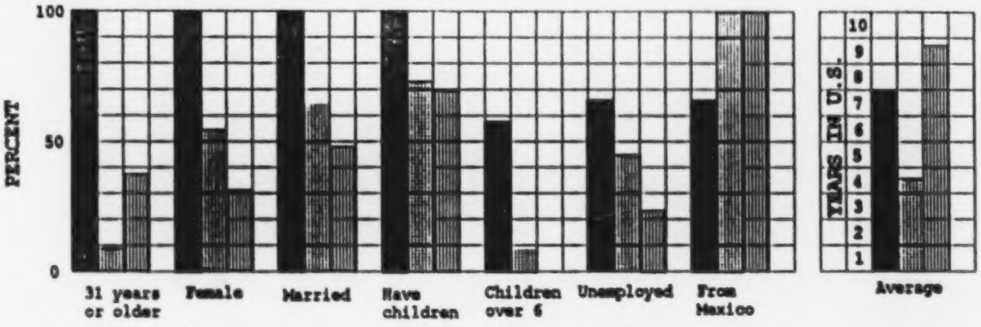
Finally, a 5:00 P.M. weather summary for each Tuesday evening from October, 1994 through October, 1995 was obtained from the TV Channel Nine News department to determine if a correlation existed between temperature and attendance.

Results

First, the characteristics of all participants in this study were examined using their responses to the questionnaires. The comparison of the Never Attended, the No Longer attend and the Currently Attend groups is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics



31 years or older	Female	Married	Have children	Children over 6	Unemployed	From Mexico	Average
100%	100%	100%	100%	57%	67%	67%	7 Years
8%	54%	64%	73%	8%	45%	100%	3.7 Years
38%	31%	48%	69%	0%	23%	100%	8.8 Years

■	CA = Currently Attend	(n = 3)
▤	NL = No Longer Attend	(n = 11)
▥	NA = Never Attended	(n = 13)

The responses indicated that the Never Attend and the No Longer attend groups are similar; but both differ from the Currently Attend group in terms of age, gender, marital status, and having children over the age of five. Most of the Currently Attend group were found to be unemployed, married women over the age of thirty-one with children over the age of six; while most in the Never Attended and the No Longer attend groups were found to be employed males under the age of thirty with children ages five or younger. In terms of the number of years lived in the U.S., the Currently Attend and the Never Attend groups averaged almost double that of the No Longer attend group.

Second, possible attributions affecting attendance were examined using the participant's responses to the questionnaires. The colligation of the three group's responses is summarized in Table 2. The responses to questions 1-8 indicated that all three groups share an awareness of and an interest in attending the ESL class, a desire in improving their English skills, and a feeling that better English skills will help them. A similarity between the groups was also noted in the responses to questions 9-15. The majority in all three groups knows someone in this area who translates for them, and most stated they do not know how long they plan to stay in the U.S. Likewise, most of the participants could attend class on Tuesdays at 5:30 P.M., have transportation to class; and if married have a spouse who wishes for them to attend class. A difference, however, was indicated between the Currently Attend group and the other two groups regarding childcare; 100% of the Currently Attend group reported childcare availability compared to 25% of the other two groups. A difference was also found between the three groups' ratings of their own and their children's English skills. The Never Attended and the No Longer attend groups rated their own English skills higher than the Currently Attend group, whereas the Currently Attend group rated their children's English skills higher than the other two groups. In addition, the Never Attended group indicated that most had attended an ESL class and found it to be helpful.

Table 2

Participant Responses

Never Attended = NA (n=13)	No Longer Attend = NL (n=11)	Currently Attend = CA (n=3)

Q1 Are you aware that there is an ESL class in LeMars?	NA yes=100%
Q2 Would you be interested in attending an ESL class?	NA yes=100%
Q3 Are you aware that you can re-enter the ESL class?	NL yes=100%
Q4 Would you be interested in re-entering the ESL class?	NL yes=100%
Q5 Would you like to improve your English?	NA, NL, CA yes=100%
Q6 Do you feel that better English skills will help you?	NA, NL, CA yes=100%

*"I'd be able to communicate better and find a better job."
*"I'd feel better. I have more communication with people."
*"Communicate, possibly get office job." *"everything"

Q7 I do not want to attend ESL class because__.	NA, NL =no response

Q8 I want to attend ESL class because__.
CA *"I want to upgrade my speaking ability and be able to write like other Americans." *"I want to improve my English." *"I want to learn English."

Q9 Do you know someone in this area who speaks fluent English?
NA yes=92% NL yes=91% CA yes=100%

Q10 If yes, does this person help you translate?
NA yes=83% NL yes=90% CA yes=100%

Q11 How long do you plan to stay in the U.S.?

NA	don't know 85%	2 years 7%	forever 7%
NL	don't know 64%	2 years 9%	forever 27%
CA	don't know 67%	2 years 0%	forever 33%

Q12 What days could you attend class?

NA	any days 92%	Tues.& Thurs. 8%	
NL	any days 45%	Tues. 27%	two days 27%

Q13 What times could you attend class?

NA	5:30PM 77%	6:00PM 23%
NL	5:30PM 73%	6:00PM 27%

Q14 Do you have transportation to class?
NA yes= 92% NL yes=91% CA yes=100%

Q15 If married, does your spouse wish for you to attend?
NA yes=100% NL yes=86% CA yes=100%

Q16 Do you have child care available if you attend?
NA yes= 22% NL yes=25% CA yes=100%

Q17 Please rate your English skills:

NA	very poor 8%	poor 38%	okay 54%	very good 0%
NL	very poor 0%	poor 64%	okay 27%	very good 9%
CA	very good 0%	poor 100%	okay 0%	very good 0%

Q18 Please rate your children's English skills:

NA	no response 44%	very poor 56%		
NL	no response 22%	very poor 67%		very good 11%
CA	no response 33%	very poor 0%	good 33%	very good 33%

Q19 Have you previously attended an ESL class?
NA yes=69% *not helpful=33% *helpful=22% *very helpful=44%

Third, an evaluation of the current ESL program was examined using the responses to the questionnaires from the No Longer attend and the Currently Attend students. The comparison of their responses is summarized in Table 3. The responses indicated that the two groups of students were similar in rating the teacher's ability, the textbooks, the location of the class, the time the class meets and the day the class meets as good or very good, and the class activities as okay or interesting. A difference was indicated, though, in the two groups' ratings of the number of students, the number of meetings and the class work. While all in the Currently Attend group rated the number of students and the number of meetings as too few, just over one-half of the No Longer attend group rated these aspects as too few. Moreover, none in the Currently Attend rated the class work as difficult, whereas 27% of the No Longer attend group rated the class work as difficult.

Although many did not respond to the open-ended questions, those that did named the teachers and conversation as what they liked about the class, and too few students as what they disliked. In answer to the question, "How can this class be improved?" one student stated, "To have different teacher for different groups of the class." Furthermore, respondents from the Never Attended group indicated that they had received a favorable impression of the ESL class from the No Longer attend group.

Table 3

Program Evaluation

	No Longer Attend (n=11)			Currently Attend (n=3)		
	poor	good	very good	poor	good	very good
Teachers' ability:	0%	36%	64%	0%	0%	100%
Text books:	9%	55%	36%	0%	67%	33%
Location of class:	0%	36%	64%	0%	0%	100%
Time the class meets:	0%	64%	36%	0%	33%	67%
Day the class meets:	9%	55%	36%	0%	67%	33%
	too few	okay	too many	too few	okay	too many
Number of students:	55%	27%	18%	100%	0%	0%
Number of meetings:	64%	18%	18%	100%	0%	0%
	too short	okay	too long	too short	okay	too long
Length of each class:	9%	73%	18%	0%	100%	0%
	diff.	okay	too easy	diff.	okay	too easy
Class work:	27%	55%	18%	0%	67%	33%
	boring	okay	inter.	boring	okay	inter.
Class activities:	0%	36%	64%	0%	67%	33%

Never Attended = NA (n=13)   No Longer Attend = NL (n=11)   Currently Attend = CA (n=3)

Q: What do you like about the class?
NL 3=no response   4=teachers   3=conversation   1=everything
CA   2=teachers   1=teachers and textbooks

Q: What did you dislike about the class?
NL 9=no response   1=too few students   1="Sometimes they talk about different
CA 2=no response   1=too few students   things of the class."

Q: How can this class be improved?
NL 10=no response   1="To have a different teacher for different groups of the class."
CA 3=no response

Q: I would attend ESL if ___?
NA 12=no response   1="If we had someone to watch our daughter."
NL 10=no response   1="If they change the hours."

Q: Do you know people who have attended ESL class? Where? How did they feel?
NA 13=yes   *"LeMars. They felt very good."
*"LeMars. They liked it but for some reason quit attending to class."
*"LeMars. They feel well when they make good class."

Q: Do you know people who no longer attend the ESL class? Why no longer attending?
CA 3=yes   *"Don't know possibly needs babysitter for kids."

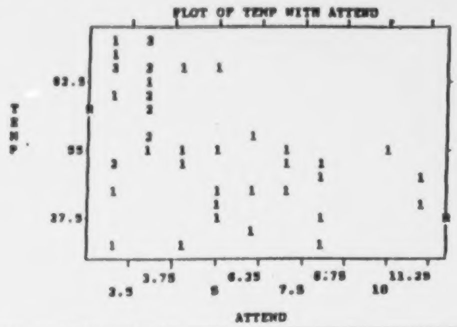
Please check any problems you are having in attending class.

	childcare	transportation	time & day of class	no problems
NL	45%	9%	9%	36%

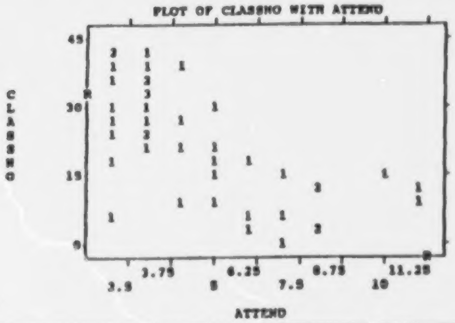
Fourth, a relationship between outdoor temperature and class attendance was analyzed using data collected from weather reports and attendance records. The correlation between temperature and attendance is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

```
Correlations:  TEMP        ATTEND      CLASSNO

  TEMP         1.0000      -.5053**     .7080**
  ATTEND       -.5053**    1.0000      -.6804**
  CLASSNO       .7080**    -.6804**    1.0000

N of cases:     43          1-tailed Signif:  * - .01   ** - .001
```



```
------------------------------------------------------------------------

43 cases plotted. Regression statistics of TEMP on ATTEND:
Correlation -.50532 R Squared  .25534  S.E. of Est   21.36403 S
Intercept(S.E.)   80.77785(  6.77477)  Slope(S.E.)   -4.83559(
------------------------------------------------------------------------
```



```
------------------------------------------------------------------------

43 cases plotted. Regression statistics of CLASSNO on ATTEND:
Correlation -.68042 R Squared  .46297  S.E. of Est    9.31323 S
Intercept(S.E.)   37.39478(  2.95333)  Slope(S.E.)   -3.34331(
```

A negative correlation (r=-.505) was indicated between temperature and attendance, suggesting attendance dropped off as the days became warmer. However, temperature is perfectly confounded with length of the program, so it cannot be concluded if attendance is decreasing due to the weather or attrition over time.

Finally, inferences were drawn from the teachers' responses in Table 4. A lack of motivation, work interference, a lack of child care and the open entry/open exist attendance policy were cited as possible reasons for the low attendance rate.

Table 4

Teachers' Responses (Page 1 of 2)

What factors do you feel contribute to the low attendance rate?

T1: Changes in scheduling of work times. When classes start at 7:00 - some workers have to leave early for their evening shift.

T2: First of all, I think that the weather played a vast role with attendance. Unfavorable conditions resulted in poor class turnout. Another concept was that the students weren't given the necessary attention because of the great variety of levels of learning. It was difficult to present a class while keeping the higher skilled students from being bored and at the same time trying to avoid overwhelming the beginners. I also feel that the students lacked self motivation and encouragement from their peers/co-workers.

T3: A cultural factor - perhaps - of being "laid back" on the importance of the true need of English as a Second language to the individuals this class was organized for. Also the hour - that is - for many falling right after being at work all day, or falling at the time many are being at work all day - or falling at the time many are on the late shift of work. Perhaps, too, fear of what others think of them and their inhibitions hamper openness.

What general observations did you make in comparing students who attended class regularly and those who did not?

T1: Regular attendance - students improved and were more attuned to the class routine. Absent - lost out on skills presented in previous lessons.

T2: Those students who faithfully attended classes had a desire to learn English. This hunger to better themselves was a priority in their lives. I think it gave some of them a feeling of independence to achieve this. Those students who did not come seemed to lack motivation and desire to improve their English skills. I also think that some had spouses that were opposed to their attending classes so that they would remain dependent on them for survival in our country. Childcare may have hindered some from coming consistently.

T3: A motivation to really learn and being able to communicate in the community with English Speaking people. Those who attend regularly seem to be very sincere outgoing people. Those who come sporadically do not seem to need to use English or want to step out of their community of those who speak their native tongue.

In what way do you feel the open entry/open exist policy has on class attendance?

Table 4

Teachers' Responses (Page 2 of 2)

T1: Students are more involved if they are given a specific time frame for attending classes and not allowed to enter or leave whenever it's convenient - many students would visit Mexico during sessions for 3-4 weeks and then return to class.

T2: I feel that the open entry/open exit policy has a negative effect on numbers of students showing up on a consistent basis. This option to "come whenever I feel like it" is too loose. I think that the students need to be encouraged to participate regularly as this will keep them interested in the program and you can move along at a steady pace.

T3: Apparently, since attendance is low - the open entry/open exit policy does not cause ESL students to commit to the class or not to commit, either. The policy is a good one and fairer in my opinion to those who have a desire to learn but have family or job commitments at times and don't always attend - hard to say if any other solution is equitable.

What modifications could be made in the ESL program to promote attendance?

T1: Provide classes during workday at Well's. Provide a pre-test in English in order to group students by their proficiency or lack of proficiency in English.

T2: I would like to see businesses recommend ESL to their workers for betterment of the company as well as the individual's personal improvement. I think there is a deficiency in promoting the program. I would like to have a larger source of materials that could be used in class to make it an interesting and fun place to learn English.

T3: To have different levels for those who have more knowledge of the language - that is - groups working together to help each other in enunciation - dialect, etc. - and groups of students working together, as beginners in the language - more conversation type teaching and sharing among the students with direction from the instructors.

Other suggestions or comments:

T1: If the class runs 2 sessions - divide the students according to their ability. 1 hour = beginner - poor attendance, etc. 2 hour = advanced, conscientious, good attendance record.

T2: The ESL class was a challenging one for me because I didn't have a clue as to how to go about teaching to adults or non-English speaking people. I wished there had been an introduction\orientation to teaching this class. I probably would have been more effective as a teacher with this.

T3: As an instructor finding a common bond and learning a comfortable pace for all students. As in any type of classroom; some individuals need the "one-on-one" more than others - repetiveness is needed more for some - thus, the student who "catches on" more easily may become bored and lose interest. This can be overcome, but, only after an evaluation of students who attend regularly can be made.

Discussion and Application

This study investigated factors that may attribute to the low rate of attendance in the LeMars ESL program. The findings indicated that there is a sufficient number of individuals who need and will likely use the services provided by the ESL class to warrant its continuation. With the exception of childcare availability and class work difficulty that needs to be addressed, no major modifications of the program are needed at this time to accommodate the target population's attendance.

In agreement with the results of previous studies (e.g., Robbins & Collier, 1993; Anderson & Darkenwald, 1979), the majority of students rated most aspects of the class favorably. As one participant in this survey succinctly stated to an open-response question, "They liked it but for some reason quit attending to class." With consideration given to the "social desirability" of respondents to answer questions as they think they should rather than what they actually believe, it appears that the results of this study support other researchers in the area that conclude, "withdrawal is less often a failure of the program itself than a result of outside forces" (Balmuth, 1988). In the case of this study, childcare problems were indicated as the prominent external factor.

Also, similar to previous researcher's findings, (e.g. Cockley, 1993b; Jones & Nesbitt, 1972) teachers cited the lack of motivation, an internal characteristic, as a reason why students no longer attend the class as opposed to the students, who cited childcare, an external characteristic, as a leading problem in attending class. Because of the attributional and motivational biases inherent in explaining others' behaviors as due to personal factors and our own as based on situational factors (Ross, 1977; Lau & Russel, 1980; Johnson, Feigenbaum, & Weiby, 1980) a definitive conclusion could not be reached that would ascribe to the high attrition rate in this class.

In support of my own assumptions regarding motivational factors, those in the Never Attended and No Longer attend groups reported a higher percentage of employment and rated their English as higher than those in the Currently Attend group. Perhaps this suggests that at this point and time, they possess sufficient English skills to meet their needs. However, my assumption that participants with children who are capable of translating English for them would be less motivated to attend ESL proved false. Perhaps this finding suggests a motivation to attend class in order to learn English, stemming from the fact that their children are in school and out in the larger community. The parents are, thereby, drawn into the English speaking community, as well, because they must attend to such things as parent-teacher conferences or sports activities. This may produce a greater need for English proficiency to remove the barrier imposed by their lack of English skills. As one of the teachers in this study stated, students who attend regularly seem to have "a motivation to communicate with English speaking people in the community, and those that come sporadically do not seem to need to use English or want to step out of the community of those that speak their native tongue."

Follow up:

The survey portion of the study ended in December and without benefit of any modifications or alterations to the pre-existing structure of the program, the enrollment increased dramatically (667%) when the class resumed in January. Interestingly, nine of the twenty-three initial enrollees were students from the No Longer attend group. Several factors may have played a part in this increase such as a change in students' work hours; however, from a conversation with Lorenzo Medrano, I believe it was due to what is referred to as a Hawthorne Effect (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1994). Participants may have become aware of the purpose of the research (continuation of the ESL class) which led them to change their behavior (entering or re-entering the class) because of the special attention they received and the payment of $5.00 for their input regarding the future of the ESL program.

To accommodate the increased number of students along with the goal of retention, several modifications were implemented in the ESL program as suggested in this and other research studies:

* A teacher's assistant was hired.

* In an effort to bridge the expectation versus the reality of what a first-time student may find, I and a student developed a letter of welcome, adapted from Blankman (1993), and an enrollment form also translated into Spanish. These two

instruments have served in eliminating lost moments of limited class time spent repeating the items as stated to each new student, and in easing the overwhelming feeling the new learner may experience upon introduction to the English language (See Appendix G and H: Welcome Letters).

* To offset class work difficulty and promote bonding, students were divided into small groups according to their proficiency in English; and tutors were enlisted from their peers and the high school Spanish class (Blankman, 1992).

* To preclude problems regarding class activities, written group assignments are given frequently to ask what activities the students like or dislike.

* To alleviate work interference for students, the time of class was changed to 5:45 P.M., and it will be held twice-weekly.

* To offset the problem of childcare availability, the students' children were allowed to attend class. The children's presence, however, has proven to be too disruptive.

* To build an in-group relationship (e.g., Thomas & Anderson, 1972) that will encourage the sense of loyalty, solidarity and identification with the class, a T-shirt bearing a LeMars ESL logo has been designed and will be given to students who maintain a six-week attendance goal.

* To provide a measure of extrinsic motivation, a Certificate of Achievement provided by the director of Adult Education in this area is awarded to students upon their completion of each book level (See Appendix I).

In spite of the aforementioned efforts, the attendance rate began to decrease as the class session drew to an end in April. I was unable to discover a reason for some students' departures, however, three students moved out of the area, one student (from the Currently Attend group) dropped because there were, now, too many people in the class, and several stated work interference as a reason for their absenteeism. Specifically, three students were able to return to work in outdoor construction; and some of the students work in a plant whose product production increases in warmer weather as do their hours of work.

In summary, the results of this study, in accordance with many other studies that have been undertaken to ultimately improve attendance rates in Adult Basic Education programs, indicates that "while there is a need to continually improve the quality of the literacy programs offered to adults, changes in programs alone will not be sufficient to deal with external deterrents to persistence" (Malicky, 1994). With the commonality of motivation as cited in many studies as a leading retention factor, further research in this area is needed, especially in the ESL class where students lack a concrete incentive as offered to those in a GED class.

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Appendix A (Page 1 of 2)

Never Attended Questionnaire

We are working on a research project concerning the English as a Second Language class in LeMars. We want to know why there is a poor attendance rate in this class. Your name will be kept confidential. Thank you for your participation.

Age: 16-20__ 21-30__ 31-40__ 41-50__ 51-60__

Gender: male__ female__

Marital Status: married__ Single__

Are you employed? yes__ no__ If yes, where?________________

What days do you work? ________________________________

What hours do you work? ________________________________

Please rate your English skills:

very poor__ poor__ okay__ good__ very good__

Would you like to improve your English skills? yes__ no__

How many children do you have living with you? __

Ages: 0-5__ 6-10__ 11-15__ 16-20__

Please rate your children's English skills:

very poor__ poor__ okay__ good__ very good__

Country of origin:________________

How long have you lived in the United States? __ years __ months

How long do plan to stay in the United States? ________________

Do you know someone in this area who speaks fluent English?

yes__ no__

If yes, does this person help you translate? yes__ no__

Are you aware that there is an ESL class in LeMars? yes__ no__

Would you be interested in attending an ESL class? yes__ no__

If yes, what days of the week could you attend? ________________

What times could you attend? ________________________________

Do you have transportation to class? yes__ no__

Appendix A (Part 2 of 2)

Never Attended Questionnaire

If you have children, do you have child care available if you attend class? yes__ no__

If married, does your spouse wish for you to attend? yes__ no__

Do you feel that better English skills would help you? yes__ no__

Please explain:______________________________

____

____

Have you previously attended an ESL class? yes___ no___

If yes, please rate how well the ESL class helped in improving your English skills:

1	2	3	4	5
not helpful		helpful		very helpful

Please explain:______________________________

____

____

Do you know people who have attended an ESL class? yes__ no__

If yes, please state when and where they attended, and how they felt about the ESL class:______________________________

____

____

Please complete the following sentences:

I do not want to attend ESL class because______________________________

____

____

I would attend ESL class if______________________________

____

____

Additional Comments:

Appendix B (Page 1 of 2)

No Longer Attend Questionnaire

We are working on a research project concerning the English as a Second Language class in LeMars. We want to know why there is a poor attendance rate in this class. Your name will be kept confidential. Thank you for your participation.

Age: 16-20__ 21-30__ 31-40__ 41-50__ 51-60__

Gender: male__ female__

Marital Status: married__ Single__

Are you employed? yes__ no__ If yes, where?________________

What days do you work? ______________________________________

What hours do you work? _____________________________________

Please rate your English skills:
very poor__ poor__ okay__ good__ very good__

Would you like to improve your English skills? yes__ no__

How many children do you have living with you? __

Ages: 0-5__ 6-10__ 11-15__ 16-20__

Please rate your children's English skills:
very poor__ poor__ okay__ good__ very good__

Country of origin:__________________

How long have you lived in the United States? __ years __ months

How long do plan to stay in the United States? __________________

Do you know someone in this area who speaks fluent English?
yes__ no__

If yes, does this person help you translate? yes__ no__

Are you aware that you can re-enter the ESL class in LeMars?
yes__ no__

Would you be interested in re-entering the ESL class? yes__ no__

If yes, what days of the week could you attend? _________________

What times could you attend? ________________________________

Do you have transportation to class? yes__ no__
Appendix B (Page 2 of 2)

If you have children, do you have child care available if you attend class? yes__ no__

If married, does your spouse wish for you to attend? yes__ no__

Do you feel that better English skills will help you? yes__ no__
Please explain:____

Please check any problems that you are having in attending class?

transportation__
weather __
family conflict__
teacher__
other__
time and day of class__
health__
child care __
location of class __
I do not wish to loose my culture__
Please explain:____

____

Please rate the following:

The teacher's ability:	poor__	good__	very good__
The textbooks:	poor__	good__	very good__
The location of the class:	poor__	good__	very good__
The time the class meets:	poor__	good__	very good__
The day the class meets:	poor__	good__	very good__
The number of students:	too few__	okay__	too many__
The number of meetings:	too few__	okay__	too many__
The length of each class:	too short__	okay__	too long__
The class work:	difficult__	okay__	too easy__
The class activities:	boring__	okay__	interesting__

What did you like about the class?____________________

____

What did you dislike about the class?____________________

____

What would you suggest to improve the class?____________________

____

Please complete the following sentences:
I do not want to attend ESL class because____________________

____

I would attend ESL class if____________________

____

Additional Comments:

Appendix C (Page 1 of 2)

Currently Attend Questionnaire

We are working on a research project concerning the English as a Second Language class in LeMars. We want to know why there is a poor attendance rate in this class. Your name will be kept confidential. Thank you for your participation.

Age: 16-20__ 21-30__ 31-40__ 41-50__ 51-60__

Gender: male__ female__

Marital Status: married__ Single__

Are you employed? yes__ no__ If yes, where?______________

What days do you work? ____

What hours do you work? ____

Please rate your English skills:
very poor__ poor__ okay__ good__ very good__

Would you like to improve your English skills? yes__ no__

How many children do you have living with you? __

Ages: 0-5__ 6-10__ 11-15__ 16-20__

Please rate your children's English skills:
very poor__ poor__ okay__ good__ very good__

Country of origin:__________________

How long have you lived in the United States? __ years __ months

How long do plan to stay in the United States? __________________

Do you know someone in this area who speaks fluent English?
yes__ no__

If yes, does this person help you translate? yes__ no__

Do you have transportation to class? yes__ no__

If you have children, do you have child care available when you attend class? yes__ no__

If married, does your spouse wish for you to attend? yes__ no__

Do you feel that better English skills will help you? yes__ no__

Please explain:____

____

Appendix C (Page 2 of 2)

Do you know people who no longer attend the ESL class? yes__ no__

If yes, please state how they felt about the class:______________

____

Please rate the following:

The teacher's ability:	poor__	good__	very good__
The textbooks:	poor__	good__	very good__
The location of the class:	poor__	good__	very good__
The time the class meets:	poor__	good__	very good__
The day the class meets:	poor__	good__	very good__
The number of students:	too few__	okay__	too many__
The number of meetings:	too few__	okay__	too many__
The length of each class:	too short__	okay__	too long__
The class work:	difficult__	okay__	too easy__
The class activities:	boring__	okay__	interesting__

What do you like about the class?________________________________

____

What do you dislike about the class?_____________________________

____

How can this class be improved?__________________________________

____

Please complete the following sentence:

I want to attend ESL class because_______________________________

____

Additional comments:

Appendix D

Teacher Questionnaire

We are working on a research project concerning the English as a Second Language class in LeMars. We want to know why there is a poor attendance rate in this class. Because you are a former teacher of this class, your insights are of great value to our research.

Sincerely,

What factors do you feel contribute to the low attendance rate?

What general observations did you make in comparing students who attended class regularly and those who did not?

In what way do you feel the open entry/open exit policy effects attendance?

What modifications could be made in the ESL program to promote attendance?

Other suggestions or comments:

Appendix E

5:00 PM WEATHER SUMMARY

DATE	SKY	MPH	TE	DP	RH%	BP"	EVENING FORECAST	ATTENDANCE
10-25-94	clear	NW 16	51	22	32	30.23S	clear & cool	7
11-01-94	cloudy	S 23	58	39	49	29.49F	pt. cloudy	6
11-08-94	cloudy	N 16	48	21	34	29.98R	light rain	8
11-15-94	clear	S 9	46	26	45	30.31F	clear	8
11-22-94	clear	W 9	36	18	48	30.45F	clear	7
11-29-94	pt. cloudy	W 7	21	18	88	30.17R	clear & cold	6
12-06-94	snow	NE 18	17	14	88	30.00F	-12° WCI 1/4 mile vis.	2
12-13-94	cloudy	Calm	17	03	84	30.25S	cloudy & dry	4
12-20-94	NO CLASS							
12-27-94	NO CLASS							
01-03-95	NO CLASS							
01-10-95	NO CLASS							
01-17-95	pt. cloudy	N 12	26	17	68	29.84R	decreasing clouds	5
01-24-95	clear	Calm	32	24	72	30.15R	few clouds/then clear	11
01-31-95	cloudy	NW 10	42	32	67	29.73R	pt. cloudy	11
02-07-95	clear	NW 23	18	05	56	30.34R	clear & cold	8
02-14-95	cloudy	S 21	29	24	81	29.63F	snow 2-3"	8
02-21-95			55					10
02-28-95	NO CLASS							
03-07-95	NO CLASS							
03-14-95	pt. cloudy	E 9	56	46	69	30.29S	pt. cloudy/late fog	7
03-21=95	mo. clear	E 17	57	36	45	29.68F	pt. cloudy	5
03-28-95	cloudy	NW 14	40	32	73	30.19R	cloudy & chilly	6
04-04-95	cloudy	SW 5	31	07	36	30.23F	cloudy/flurries	5
04-11-95	sleet	NW 3	37	32	82	29.52S	windy/1-2"snow/bl. snow	2
04-17-95	cloudy	NW 28	41	34	76	29.42R	lingering showers	5
04-25-95	cloudy	SE 13	52	48	86	29.76F	T-storms/showers	4
05-02-95	cloudy	S 7	58	34	40	29.99F	periods of showers	3
05-09-95	cloudy	NW 15	52	44	74	29.90F	mo. cloudy/fog forming	2
05-16-95	pt. sunny	N 22	73	53	49	29.60F	cloudy	3
05-23-95	pt. sunny	N 14	60	44	55	30.06F	fair skies	3
05-30-95	NO CLASS							
06-06-95	fair	SW 16	90	53	41	29.44F	mo. clear	4
06-13-95	fair	S 20	86	55	35	29.88F	pt. cloudy	3
06-20-95	clear	S 17	92	59	33	29.90f	mo. clear	2
06-27-95	fair	N 6	82	61	49	29.84F	mo. cloudy	3
07-04-95	NO CLASS							
07-11-95	fair	S 9	99	70	39	29.84S	108° Heat-Index/clear	2
07-18-95	sunny	Calm	87	57	36	29.98F	T-storms	5
07-25-95	sunny	SW 12	88	65	47	29.99S	clearing skies	3
08-01-95	pt. sunny	E 7	75	60	60	30.08F	clear skies	3
08-08-95	fair	S 14	98	63	32	29.66R	101° Heat-Index/pt. cl.	3
08-15-95	cloudy	SE 7	74	69	84	29.85F	pt. cloudy	3
08-22-95	NO CLASS							
08-29-95	fair	SE 15	80	67	65	30.05S	T-storms likely	2
09-05-95	mo. clear	SE 16	77	70	79	29.95F	Ch. T-storms/after 12am	3
09-12-95	pt. sunny	NW 8	79	58	50	29.78S	patchy dense fog	3
09-19-95	mo. sunny	N 16	57	43	59	30.14S	cl. & colder/lt. showers	4
09-26-95	sunny	NE 6	78	33	19	29.79F	clear	2
10-03-95	cloudy	NE 15	52	50	93	29.06F	periods of lt. rain	2
10-10-95	fair	S 24	87	48	26	29.64S		2
10-17-95	NO CLASS							
10-24-95	clear	W 13	56	32	50	30.06S		3

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix F

Participant Characteristics

Never Attended

Age	Gender	Marital Status	Children	Employed	Country /Origin	Yrs./Months in U.S.
16-20	F	S	0	no	Mexico	2/0
21-30	F	M	2	no	Mexico	5/0
31-40	F	S	2	Wells	Mexico	22/7
31-40	F	S	1	Wells	Mexico	13/2
21-30	M	M	2	Wells	Mexico	7/4
21-30	M	S	0	Wells	Mexico	7/7
21-30	M	S	0	Wells	Mexico	4/2
21-30	M	M	1	no	Mexico	2/0
21-30	M	M	1	IBP	Mexico	3/3
21-30	M	M	0	SPP	Mexico	13/3
31-40	M	S	2	Wells	Mexico	18/3
31-40	M	S	1	Wells	Mexico	9/3
31-40	M	M	1	Wells	Mexico	7/6

No Longer Attend

Age	Gender	Marital Status	Children	Employed	Country /Origin	Yrs./Months in U.S.
16-20	F	S	0	no	Mexico	1/0
21-30	F	S	0	Aalfs	Mexico	2/1
21-30	F	M	2	no	Mexico	5/6
21-30	F	M	1	no	Mexico	1/6
21-30	F	M	2	no	Mexico	4/0
21-30	F	M	1	no	Mexico	3/0
31-40	F	S	2	Aalfs	Mexico	2/1
21-30	M	S	0	Wells	Mexico	3/7
21-30	M	M	2	Wells	Mexico	9/0
21-30	M	M	1	IBP	Mexico	1/6
21-30	M	M	2	JRR	Mexico	7/3

Currently Attend

Age	Gender	Marital Status	Children	Employed	Country /Origin	Yrs./Months in U.S.
31-40	F	M	2	no	Mexico	5/0
31-40	F	M	3	no	Korea	8/0
41-50	F	M	2	Wells	Mexico	8/0

*IBP=Iowa Beef Packers *SPP=SiouxPreme Packing *JRR=JR Roofing

Appendix G

Welcome Letter

English as a Second Language
Instructor: Cindy Wilberding
Phone Number: 546-1704

Welcome to ESL class. In this class, we will practice reading, writing and speaking English. The first few times, you may feel that the class is too difficult or that the teacher and other students are speaking too rapidly. Do not worry! You will catch on, and it will become easier with practice. Please tell the teacher or another student if there is anything you do not understand, or if you have any questions.

Books for sale: Student Books $8.00 Work Books $5.50 You are not required to buy the books, but it makes studying much easier. If you do not buy the books, please do not write in them.

We will have a break at 6:30. If you want to smoke a cigarette, you must go across the street or into your car.

It is okay if you need to come late, leave early or miss a few classes. A class is like a family. We are glad you are here, and wonder why you do not come. Please call me or another student if you are going to miss a class.

Thank you,
Cindy Wilberding

Appendix H

Welcome Letter

Inglesh Como Segundo Lenguage

Instrutora: Cindy Wilberding

Telefono: 546-1704

Bienvenidos a la clase. ESL, (Ingles Como Segundo Lenguage). En esta clase, practicaremos a leer, escribir y hablar Ingles. Las primeras veces, sentiran que las clases son muy dificultosas o que la maestra y otros estudiantes estan hablando muy rapido. No se preocupen! Usted lo entendera, y este sera mas facil con practica. Por favor digale a la maesta o a otro estudiante si hay algo que usted no entiende, o si tiene alguna pregunta.

Libros de venta: Libros de estudiante $8.00 (ocho dolares), Libros de trabajo $5.50 (cinco dolares, cincuenta centavos) no se requiere que compren los libros, pero esto hara el estudio mucho mas facil. Si no compran los libros, por favor no escriba en ellos.

Tendremos un descanzo a las 6:30 p.m. Si usted quiere fumar un cigarro, debera ir al otro lado de la calle o en su carro.

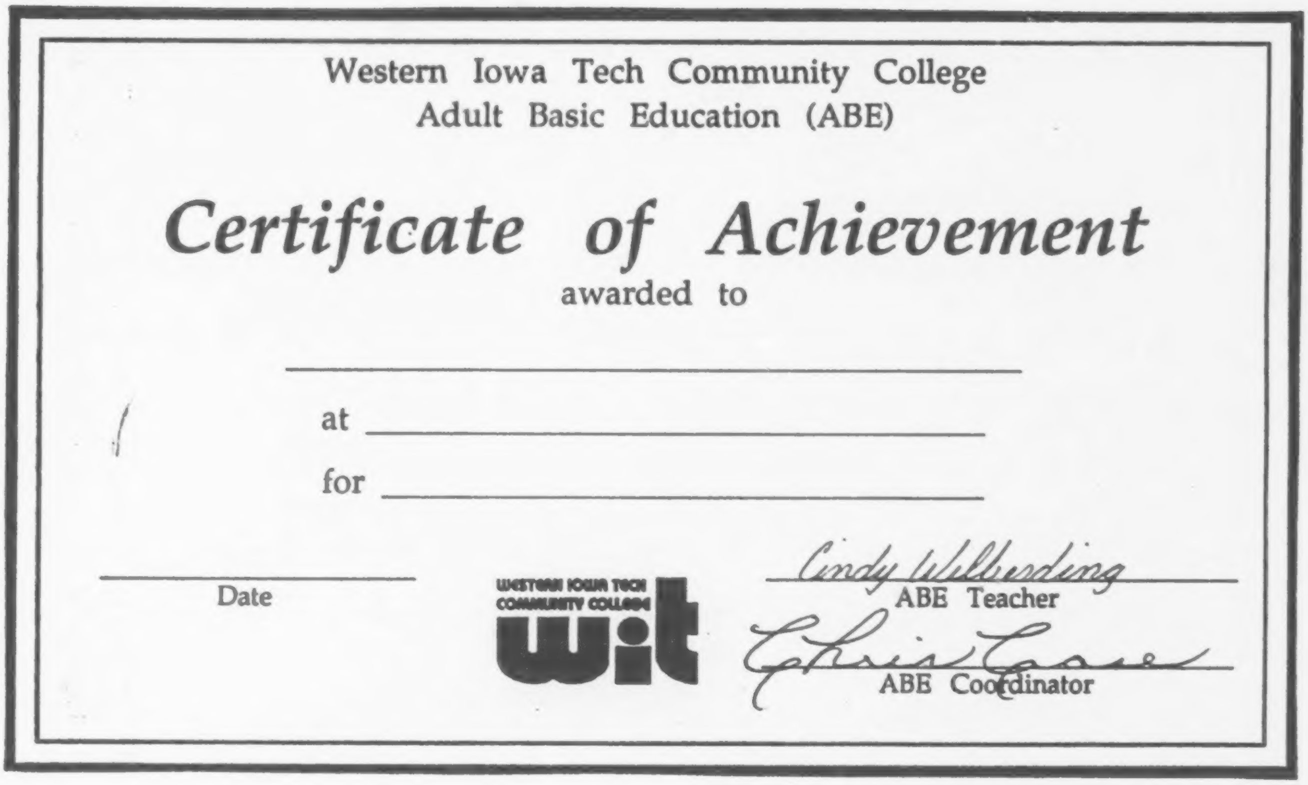
Esta bien si necesita venir tarde, irse temprano o perder algunas clases. Una clase es como una familia. Estamos agradecidos que ustedes esten aqui, y pensando porque no vienen. Por favor llameme o a otro estudiante si vas a perder alguna clase.

Gracias:

Cindy Wilberding

Appendix I

Certificate Sample



Western Iowa Tech Community College
Adult Basic Education (ABE)

Certificate of Achievement

awarded to

____

at ______________________________

for ______________________________

____
Date

WESTERN IOWA TECH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
wit

Cindy Wilberding
ABE Teacher

Chris Case
ABE Coordinator

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IOWA STAFF DEVELOPMENT PRACTIONER RESEARCH PROJECT

NIACC VOLUNTEER CONVERSATION PARTNER PROGRAM

Colleen Hovinga
North Iowa Area Community College
Mason City, IA
1996

NIACC Volunteer Conversation Partner Program

Colleen Hovinga

Practitioner Research Final Report

July 15, 1996

Overview

Background
Research
NIACC Volunteer Conversation Partner Program
Volunteer Resources
Evaluation
Future Program Recommendations
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Background

The NIACC Volunteer Conversation Partner Program was funded by an Iowa Staff Development Practitioner Research Grant. This language program set out to answer the question of whether or not establishing a volunteer conversation partner program would be beneficial to the students in the NIACC ABE English as a Second Language (ESL) class.

The students in my adult ESL class expressed their interest in communicating with native English speakers. They were interested in opportunities to interact with native English speakers. Their English speaking abilities ranged from beginning to high intermediate. Seven students are Spanish-speakers from Mexico and Central America and one student is from Poland. The Practitioner Research Grant made it possible to establish the conversation partner program.

Students benefited from this program in many ways. Their in-class speaking skills showed improvement, as observed by the researcher. ESL students reported speaking English more frequently at work and feeling more comfortable speaking in public places. One student reported that he wasn't able to understand road signs as well as he thought in the initial Self Assessment. (Fortunately, this decrease relates to reading street names not traffic/safety signs.)

Volunteer benefits included an opportunity to understand another culture and learn about the lifestyle of legal immigrants and foreign-born citizens living in north Iowa. This understanding is one necessary tool for building a solid foundation for peaceful life in a global society.

Research

Conversation partnerships can be found in high schools, colleges, and businesses around the country. Several types of partnerships exist. Language Partnerships usually focus only on the target language (English is the target language in our program.) while Language Exchanges provide the opportunity for both partners to share their native language and practice speaking in a new language.

Three programs were helpful in designing the NIACC Conversation Partner Program: Intensive English and Orientation Program (IEOP) at Iowa State University, Conversation Partners at Davenport West High School, and Tandem Language Program at the University of Minnesota. Special thanks to Lucy Zollner (ISU), Ann Hailey (DWHS) and Nancy Peterson (UM) for sharing their programs and suggestions with me!

NIACC Volunteer Conversation Partner Program

During the Spring 1996 semester ESL students met with a volunteer from NIACC to practice speaking English informally once a week during the three month program. Eight students were interested in having a partner. These students were asked to talk about and/or write goals for participation in a partnership. They expressed a desire to "talk better, improve pronunciation and be understood" as well as to "not be nervous when try to speak."

Volunteers included students, faculty and staff at NIACC. Partnerships were made based on mutual interests and language abilities (See form in Appendix). During a brief volunteer training session, we discussed reasons for participation, second language acquisition theory, program guidelines, journals, and ESL student goals. One week after the two hour training session, partners were introduced to each other in the ESL classroom. They spent time getting to know each other and set up their next meeting time.

Meetings between partners were held in homes, restaurants, gyms, and public places. Both partners were asked to come up with topics to talk about each week. They were given a list of topic suggestions but were not required to use the list. Informal conversation was more important than a structured "classroom" style of practice.

Near the end of the three month program, ESL students planned a potluck picnic for the final meeting. A main dish and beverages were provided by the researcher and students brought tasty ethnic and American foods to share. The picnic was moved indoors because of the cool temperatures in early May. Students received class certificates at the picnic and gave thank you notes to their partners. Journals were turned in at this meeting, along with final evaluations.

Volunteer Resources

Initially, it was challenging to find English speaking volunteers. There are many volunteer opportunities and other activities competing for people's time. Volunteers may be found within your school and community. I relied on the school newsletter and announcements made in several college classes. Staff and instructors make excellent volunteers. This program is a valuable learning opportunity for students in many majors, including foreign languages, healthcare, and education. Speaking to instructors and students of these classes can provide a wealth of volunteers.

Volunteer training was provided. The Volunteer Training from this program is now being modified to provide teacher inservices in K-12 schools and community colleges. Several aspects of conversation and the English language were presented. We reviewed guidelines (see Appendix) as an orientation to the program.

Reasons for having a conversation may vary tremendously between speakers of two different languages. A few examples of why American friends converse with each other include to exchange information, make joint decisions, create and maintain social relationships (Slade, 1993).

Native English speakers use natural rules of conversation but are often unaware of them:

1 Usually one person speaks at a time.
2 Speakers take turns.
3 The length of each speakers contribution varies.
4 We use techniques, like pausing, to allow others to speak.
5 Content and amount of conversation are usually unspecified.

These "rules" (Halliday, 1975) are norms that vary between cultures. When non-native English speakers follow the "rules" of their language and culture, they may appear rude or uninterested and may misunderstand intentions of Americans when they have a conversation.

We also discussed the importance of context and nonverbal signals in understanding a speaker. Stress and intonation patterns in the English language are different than other languages. We briefly covered the significance of syllable and word stress (how stress affects meaning of words) and the use of rising or falling intonation of a sentence.

5 reasons for the need and use of volunteers in an ESL program are defined by Marlyn Katz Levenson in *Establishing a Volunteer Program for ESL Student Support*:

1 General language support, academic.
2 Tutoring on specifics.
3 Cross-cultural orientation.
4 Integration into the community (school community or larger communities.)
5 Improvement of oral communication skills (fluency, listening, vocabulary expansion.)

Thank you, Marlyn, for the positive influence this information, along with other invaluable suggestions, had on the organization of the NIACC program.

Evaluation/Feedback

Both volunteers and students benefited from participation. Volunteers "enjoyed learning about another culture" and "were able to establish common bonds." ESL students learned about the community and the lifestyles of their American (English-speaking) partners while improving their oral English communication skills.

"It seemed like a good idea but I don't feel I had to "help" my partner much." Volunteers may feel pressure to be a teacher. The ESL students were interested in friendly conversation and benefited from speaking with a native speaker of English. The "help" offered in this program should not be too much like a classroom.

Future Program Recommendations

This program can be run effectively on little money if reliable volunteer participation is available. However, schools and coordinators must provide volunteer training and support. Some of our volunteers attended a two hour training session. Coordinator contact after the initial training was limited to phone calls and monthly letters. Important and helpful language acquisition materials are available for volunteers- letters are not the best way to share this information. Training sessions could be offered on several dates to accommodate scheduling conflicts. Offering a 2-hour training session two times each month would provide additional training, contact, and support opportunities.

Spend time screening volunteers. Find out their goals and reasons for volunteering and utilize their skills. One NIACC student volunteer whose partnership was unsuccessful may have been able to help with coordinator contacts and mailings. I never asked and this student may have missed a valuable experience to add to her resume.

Have partners sign a contract or proposal for 1-2 hours of meeting time and journaling each week This makes each partner aware of the commitment they are making to the program. State specific details regarding training, duration, contact requirements, and guidelines. Scheduling group activities would allow volunteers to meet each other and observe interactions between other partners.

Have volunteers submit a monthly timesheet. Hourly records provide an opportunity to recognize volunteer efforts and can be helpful in efforts to receive grants or other types of funding. Also, set the program up for a specific length of time. Several volunteers commented that they volunteered because they could try it for three months.

Participant journals are a valuable source of information and ideas for future programs. Provide notebooks and ask volunteers and students to write about topics and experiences, and to share suggestions.

Here are several time guidelines to help establish coordinator and volunteer schedules:

Coordinator Schedule (for each 10 partnerships)

Screening and Placement of volunteers and students
-10 hours.
Training
Volunteer-Preparation 6 hours.
-Sessions 4 hours/ month-minimum.
Students -Two 1 hour sessions.
Volunteer contacts and Record-keeping
-5 hours first or second week after partners begin meeting.
-3 hours/ week/ 10 partners throughout program.
Evaluation and Feedback -10 hours.

Volunteer Commitment

Interview and Placement	1 hour
Training and Coordinator Contacts	2 hours/month
Partner Contacts	1-1.5 hours/week
Record keeping-Journals/Timesheets	.5-1 hour/week
Evaluation/Exit Interview	.5 hour

Volunteer Timesheet

NIACC Volunteer Conversation Partner Program Spring 1996

Tutor's name_________________________.

Hours for the month of________________.

Week 1________hours.

Week 2________hours.

Week 3________hours.

Week 4________hours.

Week 5________hours.

Please sign and mail by the 5th day of the month:

Colleen Hovinga, 500 College Drive, Mason City, IA 50401

Thank you for your interest in the **NIACC Volunteer Conversation Partners Program**.
This program was partially funded by an Iowa ABE Practitioner Research Grant.

Please modify and share this program with your students! It can be a valuable experience for both volunteers and language learners. Similar language programs have been offered in high schools, universities, and corporations around the world. I'd love to hear about your language programs or answer questions about ESL programs in north Iowa. Please call or write with your comments and suggestions!

Colleen Hovinga ESL Instructor, NIACC hovincol@cheers.niacc.cc.ia.us
500 College Drive Mason City, IA 50401 (515) 424-4028

Appendix

North Iowa Area Community College
Mason City, Iowa 50401

NIACC Logos

March 27, 1996 Volume 22, Issue 13

Language program benefits students, volunteers

By Judy Martinez
Opinion Editor

Meeting new and interesting people can become more interesting when learning a new language.

A new ESL (English as a Second Language) class, which started in Feb. and continues through May, meets each Thursday from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at St. John's Episcopal Church, 120 1st St. NE, Mason City. The class meets in the basement and it is free.

"It is a cultural exchange that benefits both student and volunteer," said instructor Colleen Hovinga, who currently is working on her Master's thesis as an Iowa State graduate student.

Hovinga's training will lead to a Master's degree in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language).

Presently, the project, funded by a research grant through the ABE program, has students from Europe, the Middle East and Mexico.

Besides the two hours in the classroom, the student teams up with a volunteer to practice conversational English on a one-to-one basis.

Volunteers from NIACC's staff, other area teachers, secretaries and students participate in helping "provide conversational English for the ESL students," according to the ESL Conversation Partners Volunteer Guidelines and Training Manual.

Volunteers may participate in the two hour per week class, if desired, but the primary obligation is the provision of conversational English in an out-of-classroom setting.

Volunteer and student make a mutual decision on where and when to meet for one hour per week.

Possible meeting places include: the MacNider Museum, various department stores or malls, a sporting event, a movie or just meeting for coffee or pop, and of course conversation.

Any person wanting to improve his or her English or anyone wishing to volunteer should contact Colleen Hovinga at

"The class helps anyone who wants to improve his or her English," Hovinga said.

ENGLISH SELF ASSESSMENT
NIACC Volunteer Conversation Partner Program
Spring 1996

I am able to speak English comfortably at work.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

I can talk with a doctor or nurse in English about my health.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

I feel comfortable asking for directions in Mason City.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

I can easily read road signs.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

At the grocery store, I can read food labels in English.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

When I am shopping, the clerks can understand my spoken English.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

I can read the Mason City Globe Gazette newspaper.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

I speak English comfortably at work.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

I can order food off the menu at a restaurant.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

Speaking English is important to me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
😄	🙂	😐	🙁	😢

ESL Conversation Partners

Volunteer

Name______________________________
Address______________________________
City/State/Zip______________________________
Age_____
Phone (home)_________ (work)__________

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri
9-10					
11-12					
12-1					
1-2					
2-3					
3-4					
5-6					
p.m.					

Mark your available times with an X.

What time would be your first choice?_____
Are you available weekends?

What are your special interests or hobbies?______________________________
____

Do you prefer a male or female partner? Please list other preferences:
____

Are you a student? Major____________________
If not, what is your occupation?____________________

How did you hear about this program?
____
____

Please return this form to
Colleen Hovinga, ESL Instructor
c/o Karmen Shriver BC-102A
ext. 341

ESL Conversation Partners

Student

Name__________________________
Address__________________________
City/State/Zip__________________________
Age______________ Sex: Male/Female
Phone__________________________

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri
9-10					
11-12					
12-1					
1-2					
2-3					
3-4					
5-6					
p.m.					

Mark your available times with an X.

Are you available evenings/weekends?
Do you have transportation?
What languages do you speak?______________________________

Please list several hobbies or special interests:______________________________
____

What do you hope to learn from this experience?
____
____

Return this form to your instructor before February 1.

You may choose to go out on "field trips." Try to find opportunities that are interesting and affordable. A shopping trip to a department store or attending a sports event will provide wonderful conversation. If you choose an event such as a movie, have a pop or cup of coffee afterward to discuss it. Provide immediate feedback. Most people forget information (and possibly questions) within three hours.

JOURNALS

Your records are an important part of this project. Notes on discussion topics, location, your opinion of the rapport between yourself and your partner, and observations of your partner's ablilities will be invaluable when I complete my final project evaluation and report..

Take your journal folder with you to each meeting. Besides topics and observations, feel free to include your feelings or any impressions that you would like to share Please take a few minutes before and/or after each meeting to review notes and add to your comments.

MISCELLANEOUS

Students have been told to call if they are unable to meet at a scheduled time. Your partner will appreciated a call from you if something prevents you from meeting them. If you don't want to exchange phone numbers with your partner and contact each other directly please talk to me.

Thank you again for your participation! Please call me if you have any comments, needs or questions. My home phone number is (515) 424-4028. In Ames, my office phone number is (515) 294-6131.

ESL CONVERSATION PARTNERS
VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES AND TRAINING

The purpose of this partnership is to provide conversational English for the ESL students at NIACC. Volunteersmeet with one or two students weekly each week between February and May. I hope you will find this to be a rewarding experience. Your participation will make a positive impact on the life of an international student in Mason City.

Speaking skills take time and practice to develop. It is better to practice one hour each week than two hours every other week. Your partners will benefit from the combination of informal conversation and structured class every week.

Initially, you may find yourself doing more of the talking. Speak slowly and clearly. Watch for the visible "questions" your partner asks. Leaning forward suddenly, turning his/her head slightly, or eye movements can be clues that your partner didn't understand something you said. He/she may not want to interrupt you in the middle of a sentence. Please stay student focused- listen carefully to questions asked, and accommodate topic requests if you feel comfortable with them.

Don't underestimate your partners understanding of what you are saying. Comprehension comes before speech. The students range in speaking ability from beginning to semi-fluent. It will be important to try to engage the student in discussion by choosing topics that are interesting and/or related to his/her life.

TOPIC SUGGESTIONS

Talking about family or hometowns can offer a way to get to know each other. Sharing photos can spark conversation. Other topics can include current local events (political, cultural, or personal), national or international events (Olympics), the weather, personal favorites (music, food, movies). What others do you think are appropriate?

You may want to decide on a topic to discuss in advance so both you and the student have an idea of what to expect. I can give you a list of topics being covered in class if you are interested.

Repetition is necessary with your partner. I suggest you bring up previous topics at least three weeks in a row if possible. While you may be bored after the third review of the current art exhibit at the MacNider, your partner will understand more each time you bring a subject up. They may have questions they are embarrassed to ask again.

Try to meet in the same location each week. If you decide to meet at a different site, travel together or make sure everyone writes down the place and time for the next meeting to avoid misunderstandings.

JOURNALS

Your records are an important part of this project. Notes on discussion topics, location, your opinion of the rapport between yourself and your partner, and observations of your improvements will be invaluable when I complete my final project evaluation and report..

Take your journal folder with you to each meeting. Besides topics and observations, feel free to include your feelings or any impressions that you would like to share Please take a few minutes before and/or after each meeting to review notes and add to your comments. I am the only person who will read your journal notes.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Try to meet in the same location each week. If you decide to meet at different sites, travel together or make sure everyone writes down the place and time for the next meeting to avoid misunderstandings.

Sometimes it will be necessary to cancel your meeting. Your partner will call if they are unable to meet at a scheduled time. You are responsible for notifying your partner if something prevents you from meeting them. If you don't want to exchange phone numbers with your partner and contact each other directly, please talk to me.

Thank you again for your participation! Please call me if you have any comments, needs or questions. My home phone number is (515) 424-4028. In Ames, my office phone number is (515) 294-6131.

Colleen Hovinga

ESL CONVERSATION PARTNERS
NIACC SPRING 1996
STUDENT GUIDELINES AND TOPIC SUGGESTIONS

The purpose of this partnership is to provide conversational English for the ESL students at NIACC. A volunteer will meet with you each week between February and May. I hope this will to be a rewarding experience and will provide you with unique opportunities to practice English.

This program is intended to be a conversation exchange. You are asked to commit to one hour each week to practice speaking English. Your partner is committed to this, also. How this relationship develops is up to you and your partner, but no one has any obligation beyond meeting to exchange language practice. If you feel your partner wants a closer relationship than you do, talk to them or come to me.

TOPIC SUGGESTIONS

Talking about family or hometowns can offer a way to get to know each other. Sharing photos can spark conversation. Other topics can include current local events (political, cultural, or personal), national or international events (Olympics), the weather, personal favorites (music, food, movies). What other things do you want to talk about?

You may want to decide on a topic to discuss in advance so you both can prepare for the meeting. Topics being covered in class make excellent discussion topics. Repetition will help improve your understanding and speaking ability. I suggest you bring up previous topics. While you may be bored after the third review of the current art exhibit at the MacNider, you will understand more each time you bring a subject up. Repeating topics will give you more chances to bring up questions.

A shopping trip to a department store or attending a sports event will provide wonderful conversation. If you choose an event such as a movie, have a pop or cup of coffee afterward to discuss it. It doesn't take long to forget details and questions you may want to ask.

Your partner may be interested in hearing about life in your homeland. If you don't feel comfortable with a topic, let your partner know. Each culture has its own norms. Because of this, sometimes your expectations may be different that your American partner. If you are uncomfortable with your partner, contact me to talk about options.

IDEAS FOR CONVERSATION TOPICS

The following list of possible conversation topics is taken from Nelson Brooks. Language and Language Learning (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964). You can use each topic as a stimulus to cross-cultural conversation--discuss with your partner how the various topic items differ in his/her culture and in yours.

Greetings, friendly exchange, farewells. How do friends meet, converse briefly, take their leave? What are the usual topics of small talk? How are strangers introduced?

Verbal taboos. What common words or expressions in English have direct equivalents that are not tolerated in the other culture, and vice versa?

Numbers. How are numbers pronounced, spelled, represented in arithmetical notation, written by hand, and formally printed?

Folklore. What myths, stories, traditions, legends, customs, and beliefs are common?

Childhood literature. What lyrics, rhymes, songs, and jingles are usually learned by young children?

Discipline. What are the norms of discipline in the home, in school, in public places, in the military, and in ceremonies?

Festivals. What days of the calendar year are officially designated as national festivals? What are the central themes of these occasions and what is the manner of their celebration?

Holidays. What is the usual rhythm of work days and days off? What do young people do with their days off?

Games. What are the most popular games that are played outdoors, indoors, by the young, by adults?

Music. What kinds of vocal and instrumental music are popular? How does popular music differ from traditional music?

Errands. What are typical errands that a young person is likely to be asked to do, either at home or in school?

Pets. What animals are kept in the home as pets? What is their role in the household?

Telephone. What is the role of the private telephone in the home? Where are public telephones to be found and how is the service paid for?

List provided by Tandem Language Program, University of MN

Friendship. How are friendships usually formed? What are the obligations of friendship?

Personal possessions. What objects are often found decorating the bureau and walls of a young person's bedroom? What articles are likely to be discovered in a boy's pocket or a girl's handbag?

Keeping warm and cool. What changes in clothing, heating, ventilation, food, and drink are made because of variations in temperature?

Cleanliness. What standards of public hygiene and sanitation are generally observed?

Cosmetics. What are the special conditions of age, sex, activity, and situation under which make-up is permitted, encouraged, or required?

Tobacco and smoking. Who smokes, what, and under what circumstances? What are the prevailing attitudes toward smoking? Where are tobacco products obtained?

Medicine and doctors. What are the common home remedies for minor ailments? What is the equivalent of the American drugstore? How does one obtain the services of a physician?

Competitions. In what fields of activity are prizes awarded for success in open competition? How important is competition in schools, in the business world, in the professions?

Appointments. How are appointments for business and pleasure made? What are the usual meeting places? How important is punctuality?

Invitations and dates. What invitations are young people likely to extend and receive? What formalities are involved? How common is "dating" between the sexes? How is it carried out?

Traffic. How serious is traffic congestion in the large cities? What kinds of measures are being taken to control traffic? How does vehicular traffic affect pedestrians?

Owning, repairing, and driving cars. What is the role of the car in family life? Is car ownership common? Do most young people know how to drive? What are the requirements for obtaining a license to drive?

Science. How has modern science affected daily living, inner thought, conversation, reading matter?

Sports. What organized and professional sports are the most popular and the most generally presented for the public?

Radio and television programs. How general is the use of radio and television and what types of programs are offered?

Books and other reading matter. What types of reading matter, such as newspapers, weeklies, magazines, and reviews, are generally available and where can they be bought or consulted?

Hobbies. In what individual hobbies are people of various ages likely to engage?

Learning. What are the characteristics of the educational system? What is the importance of homework in formal education? What is taught at home by older members of the family?

Penmanship. What styles of handwriting are generally taught and used? What kinds of writing tools are available at home, in school, in public places? What are the conventions concerning the writing of dates, the use of margins, the signing of names?

Letter writing and mailing. How do letters customarily begin and end? How are envelopes addressed? Are there typical kinds of personal stationery? Where are stamps bought? Where are mailboxes found?

Family meals. What meals are usually served with the whole family present? What is the special character of each meal, the food eaten, the seating arrangement, the method of serving dishes, the general conversation?

Meals away from home. Where does one eat when not at home? What types of cafes, bars, and restaurants are found and how do they vary in respectability?

Soft drinks and alcohol. What types of nonalcoholic beverages are usually consumed by young people and adults? What is the attitude toward the use of beer, wine, and liquor? What alcoholic drinks are in frequent use at home and in public?

Snacks and between-meal eating. Apart from daily meals, what pauses for eating or drinking are generally observed? What is the customary hour and what is usually consumed?

Parks and playgrounds. Where are parks and playgrounds located and with what special features or equipment are they likely to be provided?

Movies and theaters. Where are theaters usually to be found? What procedures are involved in securing tickets and being seated? What can be said of the quality and popular appeal of the entertainment?

Getting from place to place. What transportation facilities are provided for short distances around town or from one city or part of the country to another?

Contrasts in town and country life. What are some of the differences in dwellings, clothing, manners, shopping facilities, public utilities, when life in town is compared with life in the country?

Vacation and resort areas. What areas have special climate, scenery, or other natural features that make them attractive for vacation?

Ceremonies. How are births, marriages, funerals observed or celebrated? What other important life events have ceremonies associated with them?

Careers. What careers have strong appeal for the young? How important is parental example and advice in the choice of a career? What financial help is likely to be given to those who choose a career demanding long preparation?

Pollution. To what extent do air, water, and soil pollution affect the quality of life? What steps are being taken by the government to control pollution?

Exercise and health. What kinds of exercise are common for people of different ages? How great is the concern for a healthy lifestyle?

Thank You to Nancy Pederson with Tandem Language Program at the University of Minnesota for this list of topic suggestions!

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Attitudes Toward Educational Opportunities for Iowa Prison Inmates

A Presentation for ABE Institute

By Dianna Ball, IMR Chapter I Instructor
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I teach in a prison that was built shortly after the Civil War to hold 840 prisoners and now has almost 1500 inmates. There are 222 officers, 133 non officers and 45 prison industries staff. It costs $35.57 per day per inmate. We have seven industries: printing, metal stamping (license plates), sign shop, wood shop, metal shop, janitorial, Braille, plus basic education. As of July 1, 1996, the Iowa State Men's Reformatory school will no longer offer a high school diploma or vocational programs. They will offer literacy and GED preparation classes. I teach the Chapter I reading and math classes full time: five classes a day and up to eight students per class five days a week. My students range in age from approximately 15 to 21 years of age. To qualify for the Chapter I program my students must not have already obtained a GED, high school diploma, or be 21 years of age at enrollment. IMR is located in Anamosa, Iowa, which is in the east central section of the state.

"Law itself is but the formulated expression of the conscience of society, and to reform the law we must first arouse public opinion to the need."(Thomas Mott Osborne 1915) After attending the ABE Institute last July 1995, in Marshalltown, Iowa, I became aware of the availability of practitioner research grants through State Staff Development for adult educators. Iowa currently has a Hard Labor bill which states that an inmate must work 40 hours a week. Originally when the bill was designed, rehabilitation programs such as school were not included in that 40 hours of hard labor. I became concerned about attitudes toward educational opportunities for Iowa prison inmates. I decided to apply for a practitioners research grant to study the attitudes. However, as of May 1996, the legislature has put education back in the forty hours hard labor. The bill expands the definition of hard labor for prison inmates to include all treatment and education programs.

Research Question:

What are the attitudes toward educational opportunities for Iowa prison inmates held by the inmates, professional corrections workers, officers, staff, correctional educators, and general public?

Study Definitions:

1. TABE- Test of Adult Basic Education- assessment instrument that assigns grade level score to the areas of reading, mathematics, language and spelling.
2. Literacy- being able to read at sixth grade level (U.S. Census Bureau)
3. Literacy- An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge potential. (The National Literacy Act of 1991)
4. Correlations- Statistical descriptions of how closely two variables are related.
5. Positive Correlation- A relationship between two variables in which the two increase or decrease together. Example: calorie intake and weight gain.

6. Negative Correlation- A relationship between two variables in which a high value on one is associated with a low value on the other. Example: height and distance from top of head to the ceiling.
7. Null Hypothesis-There is no difference in attitude between the groups included in this study.
8. Statistically Significant-The probability that differences as large as those found would occur by chance is less than 1 in 20 times or $p<.05$.
9. GED- General Equivalence Diploma

Review of Literature

According to the World Book Encyclopedia the two chief functions of a prison are (1) custody(safety) and security and (2) rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is the process of reforming criminals and preparing them to return to society by restoring them to good functioning. Rehabilitation programs include, but are not limited to education, job training, and psychological treatment. This paper will address the rehabilitation of prisoners to return to society.

To understand why correctional education is the way it is today it is important to understand where it started. "The field of correctional education is historically associated with prison reform." (Journal of Correctional Education, June, 1995)

The years from 1789 to 1875 were considered the Sabbath School period. Pennsylvania's solitary confinement and the Auburn factory model systems of prison management were used. Auburn's system isolated prisoners at night, but put them into congregate workshops under rules of silence during the day. The Pennsylvania system isolated prisoners 24 hours a day giving them tools and raw materials for labor in their cells.

Correctional education was minimally possible using ministers and the bible to teach from individual dark cells for about 7 minutes once a week in the evening. In 1789 a clergyman in Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail had to have two armed guards stationed with a loaded canon aimed at students to discourage thoughts of riot when he attempted to provide the first correctional education instruction. In 1824 Auburn's warden blocked education in the 3 R's for youthful inmates because he feared the increased danger to society of the educated convict. However, despite terrible impediments many early correctional educators negotiated,overcame, or transcended dreadful problems to help students learn.

The Cincinnati National Prison Congress in 1870 stated Principle #10 and started what is now the American Correctional Association. Principle #10 was a manifesto on correctional education. "Education is a vital force in the reformation of fallen men and women. Its tendency is to quicken the intellect, inspire self-respect, excite to higher aims, and afford a healthful substitute for low and vicious amusements. Education is therefore, a matter of primary importance in prisons, and should be carried to the utmost extent consistent with the other purposes of such institutions."(Wines,E.C.,1871) The ACA(American Correctional Association)supported correctional education and felt that the goal of prisons was not to punish, but to reform by providing education and vocational training to prisoners. It has taken a hundred years for the idea of educating prisoners to get much support from the public, lawmakers, and the corrections community.

From 1876 to 1900 brought the beginnings of correctional/special education.The United States reformatory movement flourished during this time. The reformatory movement's efforts to transform prisons into schools began. Zebulon Brockway ran the Elmira Reformatory in New York in 1876. It was considered a model of prison reform which combined indeterminate sentencing and release on parole with an institutional commitment to educational programs. Inmates who did well were released early, no one served more than the maximum sentence. Brockway graded inmates according to educational accomplishments and work performances as well as conduct. High marks made inmates eligible for privileges and release through parole. Low marks brought penalties of longer periods of confinement.

Elmira didn't work, however,for the following reasons: guards were allowed to physically punish inmates, discipline was not consistent with a humane attitude, rhetoric and institutional realities varied widely, order was maintained through fear of severe corporal punishment not the promise of rewards for educational achievement or good behavior, major overcrowding, and 1/3 of the inmates were recidivists instead of the intended first time offenders.

According to Brockway, the real objects of the prison system should be the protection of society by the prevention of crime and reformation of criminals."Legalized degradation of any criminal inflicts injury upon the whole social organism, while efforts for the highest and best welfare of any person promote the general good."(Brockway 1870) He further states that the prevention of crime involves the need for better compensation and better facilities for education.This holds true today in the 1990's.

From 1901 to 1929 William George, Thomas Mott Osborne, and Austin MacCormick were bringing forth their ideas on rehabilitation. "The aim of the law should never be mere punishment of the offender, but prevention and reform. The theory of punishment is condemned by our religion, discarded by experience, contrary to our democratic ideals, and a disgrace to our civilization. Education rather than punishment should be encouraged, which shall encourage those unfortunate men who have broken the law to learn to adapt themselves to the proper conditions of organized society."(Osborne ,1915)

The golden age of correctional education was from 1930 to 1941 when Austin MacCormick founded the Correctional Education Association. .In 1927 Howard Gill, prompted by criminologist Thorsten Sellin, kept a diary of life in Norfolk Prison Colony, Massachusetts. The prison was built by convicts to stop overcrowding at Charleston's Prison, as many new prisons are being built in Iowa today. "Ideal progressive medicine" was to be used at the colony which included the following: individualized treatment, emulating the atmosphere of a normal community, classification of groups of fifty prisoners housed and fed separately. Every man would have an individualized physical, mental, social, vocational, and avocational program. Officers and inmates jointly were responsible for governance of the institution. A system of cooperation between staff and inmates was seen. Individual programs for effective treatment and development of social responsibility was promoted. However, the diary showed that there were conflicts between treatment staff and custodial staff over decision making authority. House officers supervised inmates in their housing units had little respect or tolerance for social workers, who ran the educational and training programs. House officers considered social workers too soft and coddled prisoners. Social workers thought guards ignorant and cruel. The guards had large day-to-day authority and could undercut the rehabilitative programs. Social workers had little skill or reliable methods and no leverage on custodial and disciplinarian methods. For very similar reasons as Elmira's failure, Norfolk also failed. They couldn't control admissions into the institution with more hard core and difficult inmates entering. Custody and enforcing discipline became more important than rehabilitation. Several reasons that Norfolk failed included the following: parole abuses and inadequacies(the board used no review and supervision was minimal for parole or probationer), officers were rarely trained, caseloads were several hundred making surveillance impossible, and parole could be revoked with no trial or due process. In 1929 guards worked long hours and were unskilled, and uneducated , directed by wardens who didn't promote rehabilitation, but were only interested in maintaining security and keeping inmates in line. In 1928 the majority of prisons lacked vocational educational programs and there was no opportunity for schooling beyond lower grades. While there have been many changes since this era, many of these same problems exist in today's Iowa prison system. Iowa Men's Reformatory has cut its vocational programs and high school programs. Crowding is still a problem today, as are attitudes toward rehabilitation programs. According to the attitude surveys the Department of Corrections personnel completed, there is a discrepancy between how the DOC view education and how the inmates view it. Inmates seem to realize the importance of education and its affect on their success on the outside, while officers don't seem to give it as much value.

In the late 1960's correctional education gained identity and a place of recognition as a central part of the total correctional process.

In the 1970's there was a lot of support for education of prisoners. Federal funds to support adult basic education, vocational, postsecondary, and social education were abundant. The Adult Education Act funded large scale national programs of adult basic education and career education in correctional institutions. National grants from the U.S. Office of Education developed prison education programs in 45 states. "Adult basic education in corrections must bring about behavioral changes that relate not only to academic proficiency, but also with social, vocational, civic, and personal dimensions."(Ryan,et al.,1975)

The decade of the 1980's brought about dramatic changes in the philosophy of corrections. Robert Martinson's(1974) "nothing works" statement brought about many critical attacks on the idea of offender rehabilitation. This researcher came to the conclusion that in crime prevention and offender rehabilitation "almost nothing works." He felt that "no appreciable effect on recidivism" would be seen, whether an inmate spent the majority of his sentence in an educational program or locked in a cell. In 1978, four years later, Martinson rejected his theory, but this had little affect on the huge policy shift already underway. There was little support for correctional education during the 1980's.The rehabilitation model was given up not because 'nothing worked' but because research meant to test the rehabilitation model was poorly developed and poorly conceived. The 1980's brought about an emphasis on increasing inmate functional literacy. In 1982 the United States Bureau of Prisons set the first mandatory education policy. In the 1980's there was also a decrease in the budgets to support education of inmates.

According to Iowa's legislative fiscal bureau June 29, 1995 report , less than one third of the inmates in Iowa prisons report having completed high school. However, over half of those who did not complete high school report having earned a GED(General Equivalence Diploma). According to assessments performed at the intake of Iowa prisoners, about one fourth read at or below an eighth grade level.

Participation in educational programming is not mandatory in Iowa, but the Parole Board considers as one factor the participation in recommended treatment and educational programs in making parole decisions. Actively participating shows an attempt to change. About 30% of the inmate population monthly enroll in prison educational programs. Between 350 and 400 earn GED's annually. In FY 1995 the average monthly enrollment was approximately 1,600 inmates, and an estimated 380 inmates earned a GED. Because of the increasing inmate population and increasing demand for educational programs, inmates now spend one to two hours per day in class instead of the three to five hours per day in FY 1993. This decrease lengthens the amount of time an inmate needs to complete the GED and possibly increase his/her time spent in prison, causing more crowding.

According to Jamie Lillis(March 1994) at least half the state correctional systems have made budget cuts to inmate educational programs over the last five years. Iowa ranks 24th of the 44 responding states for educational spending per inmate. Iowa spent $414 per inmate for education or 71.1% of the national average.

In 1991 Iowa began reducing the appropriation for inmate education from $2.1 million to $1.9 million in FY 1993 where it has stayed through FY 1996. However, the first increase in this line item in over six years recently passed House File 2472. This bill increased 27% over the FY 96 funding.

The philosophy that began in the 80's of punishment, retribution, and incapacitation has continued into the 90's. There has been a prison population explosion.At the current rate of growth the population will double by the year 2,000 to nearly 2,000,000 inmates.Because of this punitive philosophy and an exploding prison population, resources in support of inmate education have been lessened. Prisons cost money. The courts are mandating reduction in crowding yet giving longer and harsher sentences."If punishment, suffering,and degradation are deemed deterrent, if they are the best means to reform the criminal and prevent crime, then let prison reform go backward to the pillory, the whipping post, the gallows, the stake, to corporal violence and extermination!" (Brockway, 1870) The prisons are full with little money to support the increasing need for educational programs. Funds,however, are used to pay for new prison construction and operating costs.Unless the state and federal governments change their sentencing laws and practices, find better, more effective and efficient methods of altering offenders or generally stop the nation's need for increasingly punitive answers to crime, we will see the prison population as large as those projected.

It seems the most sensible answer to prison over crowding is keeping inmates out of prison in the first place. Evidence has been documented on the effectiveness of correctional education on reducing recidivism."Correctional education stands as a bulwark against the vicissitudes of crime."(Winfree,1993) As Osborne stated in 1915, the law should never be mere punishment of the offender, but prevention and reform, that the theory of punishment is "condemned by our religion, discarded by experience, contrary to our democratic ideals, and a disgrace to our civilization." ."It is liberty alone that fits men for liberty."(Osborne, 1915) "Although education, alone, will not prevent an inmate from returning to prison, a growing body of evidence suggests that education is a major contributor to lower recidivism rates."(Manoucheher et. al,1993) Seven thousand federal prisoners were studied in one research project.The study revealed that the cycle of crime could be broken through prison work and training experiences. In Alabama two separate studies showed education program's positive impact on inmates ability to successfully return to society as a productive citizen. The findings from the 1988 and 1990 study showed recidivism rates of 10.8% to 10.2% for program completers, a rate well below state and national rates of 25.6% and 41.4%(Cogburn 1988). A study of Illinois inmates found positive relationships between education and employment. This study found that inmates who had received vocational and vocational and academic training had the highest rates of employment of the inmates studied.Inmates with a GED had a higher employment rate than those that didn't complete a GED. Jenkens study found that the more education an inmate had received, the more likely they were to have worked, and individuals with vocational education and college programming had the highest level of employment.(study by Anderson, Anderson, and Schermacker, and Jenkins, Steuri, and Pendry)Post release follow-up studies which include both employment and recidivism variables have determined that participation in correctional education programming is related to increased post release employment, reduced criminality, and reduced rates of recidivism.(Journal of Correctional Education,1994) In 1988 an Oklahoma study, showing that fewer than 25% of the inmates who had received vocational training in prison returned to the penal system following release, compared to a recidivism rate of 77% for the general population in Oklahoma.

As the review of literature has indicated, research shows the positive effects for inmates participating in correctional educational programs. Higher employment rates, a tendency to remain employed, and lower recidivism rates are among the benefits of correctional education. The research says appropriating more money towards the education of inmates, makes good business sense!

Methods:

Action Research Intent/Rational

The purpose of this study was to examine beliefs about and the expectations for providing educational opportunities for Iowa prison inmates.Four groups of Iowans were studied, inmates, general public, correctional educators, and Department of Corrections staff.

Permissions Obtained:

Before I completed my surveys I consulted with Warden John Ault on the content and distribution of the survey. I also discussed the project with my KCC Supervisor, Mr.

Charles Liston and the Iowa DOC Educational director, Mrs. Nancy Kucera, to get permission and advise on distributing the surveys at the school.

Questions Asked:

How important do you think educational opportunities are for inmates with respect to the following possible outcomes:

1. Improving job prospects upon release?
2. Remaining employed on the outside?
3. Avoiding recidivism/returning to prison?
4. Learning something helpful,e.g. Math, reading, and writing?
5. Developing a healthy self-esteem?
6. Developing hope for the future?
7. Developing the self-discipline needed to complete projects?
8. Developing good habits for functioning in society?
9. Earning respect from corrections officers?
10. Getting a more positive hearing/review from the parole board?
11. Preparing for a positive parole experience?

The surveys were printed on computerized scan sheets and contained (1) 11 Likert-items using a five-point scale (1=very important and 5= not sure) and (2) 19 descriptors.

Study Population Description:

Approximately 650 surveys were sent out with 330 returned. Surveys were sent to DOC workers within IMR, as well as all the correctional institutions in Iowa, and all eight Judicial Districts within Iowa.The study population was obtained through 211 Iowa Men's Reformatory inmates, 80 Department of Corrections workers, 10 Correctional Educators, and 13 private citizens. There was one parole officer and one parole board member who also responded. 10% of the survey population were female and 90% were male.65% of the total survey population were over 26 years old.

The largest survey population group were the inmates. Their ages ranged from less than 18 years of age to more than 45 years old. Only 9% declined to give their age on the survey indicating their amount of integrity in completing the survey. As you can see their ages were reasonably distributed. However, 37% fall into the category of 18 to 25 years of age.60% of the total inmates included those of first time incarceration, 20% second time, 12% third time, and 7% fourth or fifth time. 14% are in their first year of incarceration,while 50% have been incarcerated between one and three years. 36% have been incarcerated four or more years. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the inmates are a relatively inexperienced or younger group.They haven't been sitting in the system a long time. 64% have been incarcerated less than three years. These are people the system really has to rehabilitate. 56% of the inmates had some high school, 15% had a GED, and 12 % had a high school diploma before becoming incarcerated. 8% also reported that they had at least a two year college diploma. Only 88 out of 211, or 42% answered the question concerning how much schooling they received after incarceration.

This was a surprize because I thought more would have answered this question. 42% reported that they at least took some classes after incarceration. This is reasonably consistent with the 30% being involved in any given time in correctional education statewide.

Department of Corrections workers were the next largest group surveyed. One-third of this group were more than 45 years of age and employed eleven or more years. 26 % were 36-45 years of age and had also been employed eleven or more years.60% of the DOC employees were 36 or older and have been employed for eleven or more years. What this is saying is that this is a mature group of experienced workers who have at least eleven years of experience.Three-fourths of the DOC employees were male. The age break down is shown in the table below. What this shows is a mature adult population of DOC workers. It would be helpful to know how many of the DOC workers were officers, clerical, and counselors, but I hadn't anticipated the interest in this at the beginning.

18 to 25 years old	1
26 to 35 years old	9
36 to 45 years old	28
more than 45 years old	41

Of the 13 private citizens surveyed nine were female. Half of the total group were between 18 and 45 years of age and half were more than 45 years old. The private citizens were all adults.

There were ten correctional educators included in this survey. They were a relatively mature group as 50% were over 45 years old and employed eleven or more years. 62% were employed eleven or more years and were 36 or more years old. Teachers were older and more experienced. 80% were males. Their ages ranged from 26 to more than 45 years old. Half of the group were more than 45 years old.

Instrumentation:

The questionnaire (see Appendix) used to measure attitudes on educational opportunities for Iowa prison inmates was designed by Dr. Tom Sabotta and myself. It contained 11 statements describing beliefs about or possible expectations for inmates who are involved in educational activities. Responses were collected on a Likert scale using a machine readable form. Also included were descriptors of job, gender, age, length of employment, if DOC or KCC employee, and additional questions on incarceration and education obtained by inmates.

Problems:

Designing a one page survey to accommodate all the study population was a challenge. I didn't want to spend a lot of extra money for a two page survey so I condensed all the information on to one sheet. I also wanted to be able to code the surveys to ensure accuracy as much as possible. The disclaimer and address were changed on the back of inmate surveys to keep track of who was returning surveys.

Although there were some significant findings from this study, some warnings are in order. The first potential problem is the size of the population , although the return rate was around 50%. More inmates than anyone else responded. What could be a potential problem is whether the inmates responded honestly. It is hoped that these potential problems will not prevent further research with this population.

Findings:

Inmates are significantly more inclined to say education is important for improving job prospects upon release than DOC workers. Inmates are significantly more inclined to say education is important for remaining employed on the outside than DOC workers. Correctional educators and inmates think that education is significantly more important to avoiding recidivism/returning to prison than DOC workers. On all eleven questions using Analysis of Variance Tukeys Honest Significant Difference Multiple Range Test, there were significant differences between the beliefs and expectations of inmates and DOC employees except earning respect from corrections officers. Private citizens think education is more important to developing a healthy self-esteem than DOC workers. Private citizens think education is more important to developing a healthy self-esteem and hope for the future than DOC workers. There were no significant differences between any of the groups with respect to the expectation that participation in educational programs would increase respect of officers toward inmates.

Inmates responses were consistently more positive toward education than DOC workers. Private citizens and correctional educators responded very much the same for all questions. The sample size is so small for this population that I don't want to make an interpretation other than it is interesting that they were so consistent. It would be subject for further study to increase the population size to include more correctional educators from different institutions and more private citizens.

Discussion and Recommendations:

Interpretation:

In reference to education helping inmates to prepare for a positive parole experience, private citizens and correctional educator's attitudes were not significantly different, but inmates and DOC employees were. Inmates think education is more important than DOC workers for preparing for a positive parole experience. It's not that DOC workers said it's not important, because more than half felt that it was at least somewhat important. Considering the age and experience of DOC workers this some people may consider remarkable that more than 50% would say that education is at least somewhat important to preparing for a positive parole experience.68% of the inmates felt that education was very important to preparing for a positive parole experience. Is this wishful thinking, or reality for inmates? Is this what they think they are supposed to say? The officers were not intimidated to fill out a survey any particular way. Did the inmates feel intimidated?

In reference to education helping inmates remaining employed on the outside, private citizens and correctional educators were the same. Even though this is a small sample and hard to make a judgment, it is remarkable that they are so close to the same. DOC workers and inmates were significantly different, but this needs to be looked at more closely. Almost all inmates think education is very important to remaining employed on the outside. The DOC workers are not as ready to say that it is very important, but they do say it's important. Some DOC workers were negative, but not that many.

Suggestions for practice based on what I learned:

A. Changes incorporated into practice

The results of this study at first were discouraging, but as I looked more closely at the results I was impressed that inmates and correctional workers were as similar as they were considering the older more experienced officers and younger inmates. It is important to note that even with these age and experience differences the officers still felt correctional education to be somewhat important. .I would like to share the results with Warden Ault, counselors, correctional officers, commanding officers, and inmates as a means of thanking them for their support of the school. I also feel it is important to build public support for correctional education advising them of some of these results possibly through an editorial in the newspaper.

B. Changes recommended for my program state policy makers or adult educators in general

"I take normalization to mean prison policies, operations, and programs armed at preventing the growth of inmate subcultures (including prison gangs) that undermine prison management's control and support a return to crime after release. Normalization seeks to replace norms, or moral rules, supporting prison misconduct, and continued criminal behavior, with norms supporting law abiding behavior. In short, normalization dilutes, if not eliminates, the forces of prisonization and provides opportunities to instill law abiding norms and attitudes in the inmate population."(Miles D. Harer) According to Harer's research support was found for the normalization hypothesis that education program participation counters the forces of prisonization and teaches law-abiding norms. This research supports the continuance and possible expansion of education programs as a way of increasing post release success (Journal of Correctional Education, 1995) State policy is going against what research is finding to stop the cycle of recidivism. This is making it harder for inmates to obtain their education. Lessening the value of educating this states inmates will only increase recidivism. The state of Iowa needs to decrease recidivism by increasing/expanding educational programs for inmates, not eliminating them.

Suggestions for Further Research

I would recommend separating descriptors differently. It would be helpful to know more about the differences between officers and inmates instead of all Department of Corrections workers combined to compare with inmates. I would like to compare inmates in different institutions within Iowa to each other and between Iowa inmates and other states to get a bigger picture. I would also like to compare different correctional educators within Iowa and out of state to each other. I would suggest obtaining a larger sample of private citizens and correctional educators because a larger sample would hold more meaning.

Conclusions drawn from data presented within this document are open to further consideration and even speculation; however, the value of advancing the education of all inmates appears to reduce recidivism. I hope that this study proves practical to all criminal justice personnel accountable for managing Iowa's ever increasing prison population in methods that generate a safe, secure, and compassionate prison environment, protect the public, and ameliorate chances that inmates released from prison will live a law abiding and productive life.

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